Who Else. Eh?

by

Donna Coker

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CHAPTER ONE: WHO & WHO ELSE?

You've heard people talk about the miracle of birth, right? Well I'm going to tell you about the miracle of my birth, its a miracle I survived it. It seems my birth caused a bit of a commotion. I hear tell my Mother cried, a lot. Now correct me if I'm wrong but isn't it the baby who's supposed to cry at these events? I thought so. I also heard she told the deliveryman not to let my Father see me. Boy talk about your blessed event. Anyway my Mom was real upset, maybe it was because I brought someone with me without asking her first. You know how parents are. It would seem my Mother wasn't the only one upset. Besides the taxi driver getting flustered and ending up at the hospital's incinerator instead of entrance, the doctor was so upset my Dad had to drive him home from the hospital. WOW, here I was not even an hour old and causing one hell of a ruckus already, damn I'm good.

I guess expecting one baby and getting two would be a bit of a shock. Couple that with the fact we were born almost three months early and you've got a Mommy and Daddy suffering from heavy duty heart palpitations. The doctor informed my Mom the morning after our birth that the x-ray taken the day before definitely showed she was gonna have twins. Typical, a doctor goes to medical school for what is it, seven years, just so he can tell a patient she's having twins the day after she has them. Whoever said "Better late than never" was an idiot.

Mom said our heads looked like withered up snow apples. We had no hair on our heads, no eyebrows or eyelashes, no fingernails, no toenails, no nothing. We were sort of like a parcel being delivered in a plain wrapper. I weighed in at a whopping two and a half pounds while my sibling hit the scales at two pounds even. I guess we weren't exactly "Newborn of the Year" material but we had spunk. I mean the chances of two babies of our lilliputian size surviving back then, okay okay, way back then paralleled the Pope denouncing the catholic church and becoming a member of the Sally Ann, in other words the odds weren't great but beat the odds we did. Yours truly Donna May and the other one were here to stay.

Just for the record I was born a minute and a half before the other one and I am better looking as well. Of course if you ask my sister she'll say she's better looking. To each her own but remember I'm the eldest which makes me the wisest so I'm the one that really knows.

When my Dad called his mother-in-law to tell her what was happening and to announce "The girls are here" she told him she knew my Mother would drive him to drink and accused him of being in a very advanced state of inebriation. She told him to go to bed and sleep it off then hung up the phone. Dad being the persistent person he was and a staunch tea totaller I might add, persevered and finally got his father-in-law on the phone and convinced him he wasn't pissy-faced drunk and that indeed his daughter had given birth to twins. At times there is a lot to be said for the element of surprise, this wasn't one of them.

There were disadvantages to being an identical twin especially during the early years. For one thing we were always dressed in identical outfits. Mine when I had a choice which incidently didn't happen very often was blue and Darlene's (the other one) was pink. All anyone ever asked us was, "Which one are you?" Our reply was always, "I'm the other one", which drove people right nuts. Yep, go ahead you YAHOO, ask us another really meaningful question and of course the twits would because "Which one are you" was always followed by "Do people have trouble telling you apart" which was redundant not to mention asinine. During the early years I got a lot of "Hey you" and "Twinner". The potential was there for one heck of an identity crisis, happily I never had one, why I have no idea, it sure wasn't from other peoples lack of

trying. I guess I just didn't realize I could have one or maybe I was just too busy being me.

The only people who could tell us apart were Mom, Dad and God and I'm not real sure about the latter. Countless times when I was being punished for something Darlene did I'd say, "Oh Lord why me?" I never did get an answer but can you just imagine if I had? "Donna, this is God, sorry but you've got a pink blouse on today, I thought you were the other one.", uh huh. If Darlene took ballet and tap dancing lessons then I had to too. It wasn't my idea, Mom and Dad insisted we do everything together. You know there's also a lot to be said for togetherness at times too but this wasn't one of them either. I suppose if Darlene had got run over by a Mack truck I'd have been expected to do the same. Like I would have stood out on the middle of the highway calling, "Here trucky trucky", not bloody likely.

Despite the early start up date my journey down the road of life went pretty smoothly during the earlier years. Oh there were the usual twists and bends associated with childhood not to mention the occasional hair-pin curve but all in all I was motorin along just fine. Suddenly and without any warning signs I might add the road conditions started to deteriorate, not that I at eight years of age would have recognized the warning signs anyway. It was the first of many construction zones I was to encounter in my life and like gravel shooting out from under car tires my life was spreading out in an unknown direction. Our parents were separating and Darlene and I were being sent to live with our grandparents on our Mother's side of the family. Now don't get me wrong, I loved my grandparents dearly but they just didn't do things the way our parents did which was a good thing at times and not so good a thing at other times, the other times depending on how much trouble I'd gotten myself into and the severity of my punishment.

My Grampa Haslam was my idea of the perfect grandfather. Every night when he came home from his job as a bricklayer Darlene and I would meet him at the bus stop. He would give us each money for ice-cream and say, "Now don't tell your Grandmother", but somehow Granny knew because every night when we'd go to meet Grampa's bus Granny would say, "Now don't you girls ask your Grandfather for money to buy ice-cream". We never did ask you know. When Grampa would get off the bus we'd each take one of his hands to hold and the money would already be in his hands ready to transfer into ours. See we were obedient, really obedient. One time while Grampa was at work Granny just had to go out to some appointment and she couldn't take us with her. Darlene and I convinced Granny we could be trusted to stay in our rooms with the doors to the house locked so no-one could get in. Since Granny would only be gone a short time she agreed to leave us alone albeit grudgingly and left giving us these strict instructions, "Do not to let anyone in the house. I mean anyone no matter who it is. If someone does come to the door be very quiet, don't let anyone know your here alone", to which we replied, "Don't worry Granny, we promise. We won't let anyone in and if some one does come to the door we'll be real quiet".

Shortly after Granny left Darlene and I heard a car pull in the driveway and soon after someone knocking on the door. Darlene and I true to our promise stayed very quietly in our room. After a few minutes the knocking ceased and we heard a car start. We peeked out the window just as the car was pulling out of the driveway to see who had been there, it was Mom and Dad! Boy talk about two sorry lookin souls, Darlene and I were inconsolable. Wouldn't you just know it, after not seeing our parents for such a long while they finally came calling and we couldn't answer. Why we had to pick that day of all days to do as we were told for once in our lives is something I'll never know. We sure could pick our moments not good ones mind you but we sure could pick em. Shortly after Granny came home to find us in tears and wailin like

wounded whatevers over missing Mom and Dad. For years afterwards Granny would proudly relate the incident to people when bragging about how well behaved we were, uh huh, if she only knew or maybe she did.

You see Grampa Haslam was a real softy. He'd let us raid Granny's baking supplies and we'd pig-out on shredded coconut, maraschino cherries, chocolate chips, walnuts and butterscotch chips till our tummies were bulging. It was heaven. Of course the fact Granny wouldn't have approved and that all that stuff wasn't good for us just made it taste even better. I think the best part was when Granny would discover the stuff missing and Grampa, Darlene and I would all act like dumb dodos as to the what happened and wherefores of the missing goodies. We all had a conspirital look which I'm sure Granny noticed but she never let on. I think Granny felt like since she had to take a mother sort of role with us that she had to be stricter than if she was just Granny so when she let us think we were getting away with stuff it was her way of balancing things out. Ain't Grannys great?

Grampa used to roll his own cigarettes and sometimes he'd let Darlene and I roll them and on occasion smoke em too. Yep, Grampa pretty well let us do anything we wanted whenever Granny wasn't around that is. When Granny was around Grampa would say, "Cripes" a lot and mutter "Nag, Nag, Nag" under his breath.

Yes siree, Granny Haslam was something else. She would have made an ideal suffragette. She was one of those, "Lips that touch liquor will never touch mine", sort of people. I guess her and Grampa didn't fool around much and if they did they didn't kiss while doing it because Grampa did like to indulge a bit at times. One time at a party Darlene and I spiked Granny's orange juice with vodka, what a hoot. Granny got right pie-eyed and if she'd smiled any wider she would have been wearing her lipstick on both her ears. When Granny staggered over to the town drunk, sat on his knee, smiled and said, "Hi, I'm Granny", Grampa caught on to what Darlene and I had been doing and gave us what for. When we put Granny to bed she kept repeating over and over, "All I see is orangee orangee". No wonder the woman didn't cotton to alcohol.

Granny Haslam had her own unique form of punishment, it was called a hairbrush. When she'd brush our hair which was a mass of tight natural curls she would hold our chin and jaw in a vise-like grip with one hand while she pulled our hair out by the roots with the hairbrush in the other hand. The harder she brushed out our hair with the one hand the tighter the grip of the other hand on our jaw. I figure it must have had something to do with the law of physics or else Pluto was in the seventh house of the fifth moon or whatever but boy what a grip. No wonder I never heard anyone tell Granny to, "Get a grip". If Darlene or I acted up during the hair brushing bit and believe me it was an impossibility not to Granny would just convert the brush to a knuckle rapper, WHACK!!, it was more like a knuckle buster. People may have thought being put on the rack in medieval times was torture but pshaw it weren't nothin compared to Granny armed with her hairbrush.

Every once in a while Granny would get the urge to cut hair. Being fleeter of foot than Darlene I always managed to forego that little bit of pleasure and I made darn sure I didn't return until Granny lost the urge. Darlene sported a spiked hairdo many, many, many years before it became fashionable. Heh, heh, always a fashion leader she was.

Granny may have been strict but she loved doing things for her girls, namely Darlene and I. She sewed beautifully and was always making clothes for her twins, identical outfits naturally. If there was anything special we wanted her to make us she'd try her darnedest to comply. She

wanted her girls to be in style although at times it wasn't exactly to our advantage. One year for Christmas when our parents were back together and we were all together again Granny gave Darlene and I each a pair of bright purple and orange plaid knickers. Now they might have been the height of fashion on the streets of a metropolis like Toronto where Granny lived but to wear them on the streets of a little ole town like Huntsville where we were then living would have meant instant death due to extreme embarrassment. Granny did try and at times she was very trying.

Granny Haslam did her best to keep us on the straight and narrow, the very straight and exceedingly narrow. This from a woman who thought nothing of going pee on the side of a busy highway in broad daylight or who wore short little cotton house dresses and no underwear and then would sit in a position I can only describe as not very ladylike.

Once a few years after my parents reconciliation I was visiting Granny and she saw my boyfriend of the month kiss me on the lips. She lost no time informing me that if I kissed boys on the lips I'd get syphilis. I had no idea what syphilis was but her tone of voice convinced me that it was at the very least fatal. During dinner my first night home after visiting Granny I asked my Mom, "What's syphilis?". If your ever looking for a sure fire way to get peoples undivided attention that'll do it, everyone just turned to stare at me and there was an instant silence. Finally Mom broke the silence and in a high pitched voice bordering on hysteria she asked, "What did you say?". From everyone's reaction I figured, "Oh Lord, it's even worse than I thought". In a barely audible voice I nervously repeated my question. There was still that God awful silence. I felt like I'd stepped on a land mine and it was the millisecond between stepping on the mine and the inevitable explosion. Dad cleared his throat with a loud HURUMPH and asked me why on earth I would want to know what syphilis was? When I started explaining about what Granny had told me it was like finding out the land mine was a dud. You could literally see the relief on everyone's faces and it wasn't spelled p-e-n-i-c-i-l-i-n either. I guess syphilis wasn't what you'd call a suitable subject for discussion around the dinner table because the subject got changed right quick and I never did get an answer to my question. They say if you don't ask questions you won't learn anything and they're right. I asked a question and I learned not to ask that question.

Granny Haslam used to hire out as a cook. She'd do banquets and such and occasionally she would fill in at various institutions if she was needed. Granny came home from work one day with a story about one such place using dog food to make meat loaf. Uh huh, guess what she served to us for dinner that night, you got it, MEAT LOAF. Boy talk about timing or I should say lack thereof. I've probably been called a lot of things in my life but Gainsburger Gobbler ain't one of em. Speaking of eating, Darlene and I while living with our grandparents had the perfect solution for getting out of eating anything that didn't strike our fancy. Granny always let us eat at a little table in front of the television in the living room while she and Grampa ate in the kitchen. It was probably the only peace and quiet she got. Although we weren't exactly dual devils, Darlene and I weren't quite what you'd call angels either. I know hard to believe ain't it. Anyway, anything on our plate we didn't want we'd just wrap it up in our paper dinner napkin, go to the bathroom and flush it down the toilet. Oh come on, it ended up there anyway, one way or the other. Granny never did catch on and besides it gave her a good feeling to be able to brag to all her friends about what good eaters her girls were.

Besides making sure Darlene and I ate nutritious meals to keep us healthy, heh heh (we all know how well that worked), Granny also made sure we were dressed adequately for whatever the weather. In the winter time adequately meant wearing God awful thick brown stockings held

up with a garter belt and bloomers. Can you believe it BLOOMERS. Now I'll admit I've lost the first bloom of youth but even when I was a kid brown stockings and bloomers were supposedly a thing of the past. You'd have thought Granny had never heard of pantyhose but then Granny herself wore stockings held up with garters she made out of the elastic she used in skirt waistbands so I suppose anything is possible. Its a darn good thing mini skirts hadn't been invented back then or I'd have died of humiliation if anyone had of caught sight of my undies. Well Grannys adequate apparel pretty much went the same way as her nutritious meals. There wasn't much Darlene and I could do about the bloomers but every morning on the way to school as soon as we were out of sight of Granny's house off came those wretched stockings and garter belt. You'd have thought Granny would have caught on to what Darlene and I were doing by the amount of colds we caught but she didn't. Unbenounced to Granny she did get even with us though, because of the numerous colds Darlene and I came down with Granny made us swallow unbelievable amounts of cod liver oil, YUCK!! God was that stuff horrid not to mention unpalatable. We could get it into our mouths alright but our throats kept rejecting it. I guess Granny never heard about cod liver oil capsules either. I prayed Granny would get with it but she never did. Granny figured that anything that made life easier couldn't be any good. Yeah right Granny what about fire, the wheel, automatic transmissions?

Granny Haslam misguided as she was did try and like I said before she could be very trying like the time she helped Darlene with her math homework. Granny went through each part of the question to make sure Darlene understood it and got the right answer which was as it should have been. What shouldn't have been was Granny marking down the answers. When Darlene handed in her homework the next morning her teacher figured Darlene had gotten someone else to do her homework. Darlene was sent to the principals office where she was given the strap. I hate to keep repeating myself but Granny did try.

After about a year of living with the grandfolks, Darlene and I went to live with Dad in his hometown of Huntsville. After Mom left, Dad had relocated there to start up his own plumbing and heating business. The house we moved into sure wouldn't have made the centre spread in Better Homes and Gardens. It was a two room, white wooden structure with black trim around the windows. There was a 3'X 3' wooden box that looked like a little cupboard nailed to the outside of the structure about four feet off the ground and a little to the left of the front door. That was our refrigerator. Boy talk about mod-cons. The maintenance for our refrigerator was very easy, in summer you put a fresh block of ice in whenever the old one melted away and in winter good ole Mother Nature took over the ice bit. Of course Mother Nature was a tad over-zealous and whatever you took out of the refrigerator had to be thawed for hours which wasn't exactly a good thing if you were impatiently waiting to have a glass of milk. The house had two rooms. One room was a bedroom Darlene and I shared and the other room was a kitchen, living room and Dad's bedroom combination. Dad cooked our meals on an old black cook stove which was fuelled by a subsidiary of Mother Nature called The Hay & Co. who supplied slab wood to the town residents. The cook stove also doubled as our heating system during the winter months. The house was about a hundred yards from the road set back amid some trees. It was very picturesque as was ye ole outhouse which was a good fifty feet to the left of the house. After dark or in cold weather a covered pail under our bed precluded trips out to the biffy.

Back in those days you learned to amuse yourself, you had to, the television reception was lousy. Of course if you were really bored you could turn the television on if you were lucky

enough to have a television that is and try to pick out shapes from the snow on the screen. Oh look isn't that a bear, no wait its someone singing, no wait he isn't singing he's riding a horse, no its a camel, its Mr. Clean or wait maybe that's Madge, see what I mean, fun eh?

There were other things we amused ourselves with. Skiing, skiing was good, on wait, well maybe, oh heck at least it was relatively inexpensive. Today to ski you've got to have designer ski clothing, top of the line skis, bindings, boots and then you've got ski club membership fees, the cost of lift tickets and then to top it all off payment for transportation to the ski hill, bus, taxi, Corvette, Cadillac etc. When I skied during the early years I donned my Sears mail order catalogue snow suit, trotted half a block to Grandma Coker's house, dug an old pair of skis out of the back shed, borrowed a couple of rubber sealer rings (you know the ones you seal mason jars with in canning season) from Grandma and use them to hold my regular winter boot type clad feet to the skis, make my way gracefully, heh heh, slippin and fallin a couple of hundred yards up the street to Reservoir Hill and VOILA, I was ready to ski. Of course it would have been a lot more fun iffin I'd known how to ski. The first time I managed to ski all the way down the hill without falling I encountered a big ole maple tree at the bottom. SMUCK!! Suffice it to say my nose got sort of shifted a tad and a slaughter house floor during a slaughter of major proportions would have looked immaculate compared to the snow around my body when I came to. Sure scared the hell outta me. Luckily a bit of weakness due to blood loss and somewhat mis-shapen facial features were the only consequences of my exciting albeit short down hill skiing career. Who else eh, it could only happen to me.

Sledding, sledding was better. The town of Huntsville was built on and around a lot of rock so there were hills here, there and everywhere. At the end of town where I lived there were three hills, one little but steep one and two huge, long twisty, windy ones. The street twisted up through all three hills. It would take me a good half an hour or so to trudge up them hills tottin my sled behind me and only a couple of minutes to ride back down but what a ride it was. At the top I'd start back about twenty feet from my sled, run like hell, do a belly flop unto my sled which started it off and grab onto the steering handles real tight. I'd be racing down them hills like a bat outta hell with the cold wind freezing the exuberant grin on my face. The street was narrow in places and oncoming cars were a bit of a problem especially if you weren't real proficient in the steering department and I weren't but it only added to the excitement. Of course any oncoming cars weren't going very fast if they were going at all. They were usually stuck or about to be because of the steepness of the hills and the road conditions. The town plowed about as proficiently as I steered sledding or skiing.

Those childhood times in Huntsville may not sound like much compared to today but in some ways they were a whole lot better. We didn't have much materially but no matter how bad off you were there was always someone you knew who was worse off. Those days we spent while living in that little house are responsible for some of my happiest childhood memories excluding the skiing bit, of course.

It was around that time my love affair with critters began. I mean the four-legged variety although I've met countless people (namely men) through the years who'd qualify under the four-legged jackass variety and some who qualified under the no-legged snake variety but that's covered in a later chapters. What I mean is the Rover dog type critters.

One morning Dad opened the door to get something out of the fridge, (you know I told you about the fridge, the box outside the door, yep that's the one) well anyway when he opened the door there was this cute little mutt standing there. Dad made a scary noise to run the dog off and

instead the dog just walked right into the house. Between you and me Dad's scary noises weren't all that frightening, he sounded like an inebriated hedgehog with the hiccups, Dad I mean, not the dog. Darlene and I were real excited about having the dog for a pet until Dad put the kibosh on the idea by telling us we couldn't keep him. Dad said the dog belonged to someone somewhere and he'd go home when he was hungry. Uh huh, what Dad didn't realize albeit unwittingly was he'd just told us how we could keep the dog around. For about three weeks things were great. While Dad was at work Darlene and I would go down to the Red & White store, get a can of dog food and feed la mutt now known as Tippy. Tippy was a pomeranian type dog. He was small and frisky, smart and a whole lot of fun to romp around with. He was also a good listener. You could tell Tippy anything and he wouldn't tell a soul.

Every morning after Dad left for work Tippy would appear on the doorstep. I guess he'd hide somewhere till he saw Dad leaving then come on down. Tippy would spend the day with us and then disappear just before Dad got home from work. Being a plumbing and heating contractor Dad didn't work any set hours so it amazed me how Tippy always knew when Dad was coming home, I sure didn't. Darlene and I were feeling pretty sassy for managing to put one over on Dad, uh huh, that is until Dad got a bill from the Red & White store for the dog food we'd been charging. Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive. There was no way we could convince Dad we'd developed a taste for Dr. Ballards. Dad actually took our deception pretty well, pretty well for a parent that is. Grounding hadn't been discovered yet or at least not by Dad so we got a strong lecture on morality. Believe it or not I actually gained some wisdom from Dad's words. I learned that if I was gonna deceive someone than I'd have to be a whole lot better at it than I was and that meant paying attention to a lot of little details. I decided right there and then to be as honest as I could. GOTCHA! I bet you thought I was going to say something else. The truth is little details back then were not really my forte. I couldn't be bothered with them. You might say I was too lazy to lie and that's the truth. Oh by the way, Dad told us if we could find Tippy's rightful owner and he agreed to let us keep him we could. Well we did, he did and we did.

My grandparents on my Dad's side of the family were a whole nother story. Grandma and Grampa Coker were Free Methodists and very deeply committed to their religion. From Grandma and Grampa stemmed Robert, Carl, Edward, Norman, Lawrence, William, Roy, Alvin, Gordon, Arthur, Donald, Ernest, Sharon and Viola. Boy, no birth control controversy there. Sorry, I didn't really have to list them all but I wanted to see if I could remember all their names. You wouldn't believe the number of people that branched out from Grandma and Grampa's stem and I wouldn't even attempt to name them. Lets just say it was a whole new generation and we ain't talkin no soft drink here.

Grandma Coker was the biggest woman I ever saw and I don't mean fat. She was big boned and although she wore a size twelve or thirteen shoe her feet didn't look big in proportion to the rest of her body. For such a big woman she sure could move fast. Whenever one of her offspring needed a good whoopin and with the size of her family someone was always into something, Grandma Coker would grab a stick of kindlin off the wood pile and take off after whoever for whatever. When she'd catch the guilty party and she always did, eventually, the ole, "Spare the rod and spoil the child", saying would apply and applied it was. One time while Grandma was scrubbing the kitchen floor one of her brood snuck up behind her and let a snake loose. The next instant Grandma was a- top the kitchen table just a hollerin. It seems Grandma Coker wasn't overly fond of snakes. I don't know which one of Grandma's youngins was responsible but I hear

tell when she eventually was coaxed down offa the table she grabbed a stick of kindlin and pursued that child with a relentlessness that would have put a mountie to shame. I don't know what happened after she caught him but I do know it never happened again. I guess when twelve of your fourteen children are boys, (talk about your dominant genes) you have to expect anything, anytime, anywhere.

Grandma Coker was one of the best cooks ever, nothin fancy, just plain home cooking. She was always baking something and made oatmeal and sugar cookies that were absolutely huge not to mention delicious. I never ate breakfast before leaving the house for school each morning, heck no, I'd just stop off at Grandma's house and grab a cookie to eat on the way and believe me it took me until I got to school which was a good mile and a half away to finish it. Were talkin a BIG cookie here. Grandma made all her own bread too, from scratch. She wouldn't have none of that store bought stuff. She would be up every morning at the crack of dawn to mix the ingredients, knead the dough and leave it to rise on the shelf above the stove. When it had risen for the first time she would knead it again and leave it to rise once more before she baked it. Me, I use a tried and true method as well. I hop into my car, drive to my local grocery store and buy a loaf of bread. Oh occasionally I get the urge for homemade bread so then I have to work a little harder. I get into my car, drive to the local grocery store, buy a loaf of frozen homemade bread dough, drive back home, put it in a greased pan to rise then after its risen I have to turn on the oven and put the bread in to bake. Its a lot of work but the results are worth it, heh heh, who else eh? Grandma kept all her baked goods in five gallon tin lard pails. She did all her cooking and baking on a cast iron wood stove and she used cast iron pots and pans. You might say Grandma was into heavy metal and I don't mean no musical group.

Grandpa Coker's job was to keep his boys on the straight and narrow. I never figured out how he kept track of all of them all of the time but he did. Grandpa had a little workshop beside the house and he did some carpentry. He made little whirligigs and such but he was most renowned for his legendary work on staircases, namely his own. Grandpa's house was comprised of two stories. The main floor consisted of a parlour, dining room, kitchen and master bedroom. A staircase located in the kitchen led to four bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. Yeah I know, four bedrooms for fourteen kidlets. I'll bet not one of them ever laid in bed feeling alone, heh heh. Anyway, whether it was just simply indecision on Grandpas part or an ingenious way to keep track of twelve sons and two daughters I don't know but Grandpa kept moving the staircase. Were not talkin one of those mobile thingys on wheels here, hell no, were talkin a big, wooden, twenty-one step, permanent stairwell, stationary type staircase. Just to give you an inkling of how good Grandpa was at it was one night when my Mom and Aunt were staying with my grandparents. My Mom and Aunt went out for a few drinks, actually quite a few, anyway they were a tad tipsy when they returned home. They tried to sneak in as quietly as they could as Grandma and Grandpa were staunch advocates against the evils of drinking the devil's brew. Mom and my Aunt found it impossible to sneak up the stairs to go to bed and not because they were too drunk, oh no, it was because they couldn't find the stairs. Uh huh, Grandpa, he'd moved the entire staircase while they were out. Just boggles the brain, don't it? I mean he'd have had to cut a hole in the downstairs ceiling, upstairs floor, whatever for the stairwell in the new place he'd moved the staircase to, filled up the hole in the upstairs floor, downstairs ceiling, whatever where the staircase had been moved from plus move the staircase in its entirety besides. That man could have made a fortune at Renovations-While-You-Wait. I don't know about you but I find the fact Grandpa could move an entire staircase and all that it entailed and finish the job so

you'd never know it had been moved in the first place and all in the matter of a couple of hours pretty darn amazing. It certainly was a novel way of keeping track of his offspring which I figured was Grandpa's reason for doing it in the first place as apparently it happened regularly. I guess Grandpa took his parenting duties seriously. I wonder how many times Grandpa was awakened at night to hear, "I'm home now Dad and I'm really tired. It's only ten o'clock so I'm not late so if you'll just tell me where the stairs are I'll go to bed". I wonder if Grandpa ever pulled his hide and seek bit with the staircase after all his offspring were already accounted for and retired for the night? He probably did just to make sure they stayed put.

Although Grandma and Grandpa Coker were strict, God fearing folk they were also kind and understanding. I remember one christmas, I was about nine years old. Dad gave me the money to do my own shopping for christmas presents. It was the first time I'd ever done it all by myself and I wanted to do a good job to justify Dad's faith in me. I spent a lot of time searching for just the right gift within my very limited budget for everyone on my list and I was particularly proud of the gift I'd gotten for Grandma and Grandpa Coker. It was a little tray with six of the cutest, little glasses to put on it, you got it, unbenounced to me the cute, little glasses were shot glasses for liquor. The ideal present for people dead set against the consumption of alcohol. Who else eh? Instead of hiding my gift away somewhere out of sight Grandma and Grandpa displayed my gift in a place of honour on the sideboard in the dining room for all to see. Now that's understanding.

Whenever anyone in the neighborhood was sick Grandma would bake extra bread and stuff to give to the family and her and Grandpa would help anyone, anytime because that's what the good book said to do, Love thy neighbor. Their lot in life couldn't have been easy with fourteen children to raise, the financial hardships alone must have been pretty awesome but Grandma and Grandpa never complained. Grandma and Grandpa Coker took each day as it came and believed in the power of prayer. Their approach to life may have been simplistic but the results proved its validity. Every single one of their fourteen offspring grew up to be a productive, well respected, successful member of society. No, grandchildren aren't included in the preceding statement, besides it was only that one time and the police just held me in custody for an hour or so, I was never charged. Well I wasn't, I'll explain all about it in the next chapter.

After living in Huntsville for a year or so, Dad took Darlene and I back down to visit with Granny and Grampa Haslam. It was great to see them again especially since we knew we weren't being taken back down there to live again, we were just visiting. Uh huh, oh the innocence of youth, well it sounds better than stupidity, it was a set-up. No, we weren't going to live with our Grandparents again but we weren't going to be going home with Dad either. You see Mom was waiting at Granny Haslams to see us and the real reason for our visit was so Darlene and I could choose who we wanted to live with. What a hell of a burden to lay on us that was. How does a child choose between two parents that she loves equally? I said I wanted to go back to Huntsville to continue living with Dad. Darlene just had to be different or maybe it was ornery because she decided she wanted to live with Mom. After ten years of doing everything together she had to pick that day of all days to have an identity crisis. Darlene like me, had her moments and again like me that sure wasn't one of em. Not hard to tell we were identical is it?

Although Mom and Dad were at odds over our custody one thing they both agreed on was that we shouldn't be separated so before I knew what was happening I was on my way to Ottawa to live with Mom and Darlene. I should have sued or at the very least had representation by legal counsel but at ten years of age I didn't know what rights were let alone what legal counsel was.

Maybe I should have set up a picket line in front of Granny's house and carried a placard with LOCAL CHILDRENS UNION 101, ON STRIKE, PARENTS UNFAIR written on it in big black crayon and chanted, FREE THE CHILDREN. I would have done that but again I didn't know what a picket line, union or protest was then either. Back then parents had all the rights because they knew what was best for the child. Yah right, what moron came up with that one?

Ottawa was like a whole other planet to a kid from the sticks. Gee willikers, I gots to see the Tulip Festival, them thar parliament buildings, the peace tower and the Rideau Canal. I shook hands with the then Governor General of Canada, Roland Michener and I even swam in the swimming pool at the world renowned Chateau Laurier Hotel. Oh joy, oh bliss, oh whoopee ding, I'm just kidding, it wasn't all bad. I met a lot of new and different people and expanded my up until then very limited horizons.

To start with we lived in an apartment which was certainly a new experience. Apartment living was okay but I still would have preferred to go back to our little two room house in Huntsville although I wouldn't have minded taking the indoor plumbing along with me. Another perk I got from living in an apartment was gainful employment walking people's dogs at lunch time and after school which I loved doing especially since back then there was no such thing as stoop and scoop. My favorite customer was a woman with two scottie dogs. The reason I liked walking her dogs best was because Mom had bought me a skirt and blouse with big scottie dogs printed on them and when I wore it while walking Angus and McTavish people would look at me passing by and think they were my dogs. Well they were while I was walking them. Possession was nine tenths of the law. I missed Tippy something fierce.

I made a lot of friends while living in Ottawa but there were three who were really memorable. The first one was a girl named Arindale Arundel Waite. Her father was an interpreter or something at the parliament buildings. Every morning Arindale's father would drive us to school in his Jaguar by which I was suitable impressed. It sure beat the hell outta Dad's ole, blue panel truck and Mom's little, blue Volkswagen Beetle. At least Mom and Dad were on the same wave length colorwise.

The second person was also a girl, her name was Linda Holmes. Linda's didn't have a father, he had died. My Dad wasn't dead but I sure didn't get to see him very often so in a way we were sort of connected. Linda's mother worked and was gone all day. I used to go home for lunch with Linda quite often. I was so impressed by the way she made her own lunch and cleaned up after by putting her dishes in the dishwasher. Silly eh, well I know better now. The only way I'd be impressed by someone putting dishes in a dishwasher these days would be if someone gave me a dishwasher and was putting MY dishes in it.

While living in Ottawa I had my first encounter with a strange phenomenon, the third of my memorable friends, a boy named Greg Tricklebank. Until then boys were just part of the gang like they had been back in the sticks. Someone you played baseball with and tackle football on the lawn of the old catholic church, they were your friends, your buddies. Uh huh, how was I supposed to know they were good for anything else? One night Greg and I were just hanging around with the gang when Greg said he wanted to talk to me alone. We stood in the doorway of an apartment building and after a lot of spittin and sputterin on Greg's part he presented me with a ring. I was speechless, (I know hard to believe but I was). It was one of those rings you get out of a bubble gum machine but it was the first time a boy had ever given me anything unless you count the bruises I got playing tackle football. I was thrilled. When Greg presented me with the ring he said, "I want you to have this but it isn't because I like you or anything". Yeah right, the

guy gives me a ring because he doesn't like me and they say women are hard to understand? I wonder what I'd have got if he liked me? As you can tell, my first encounter with the opposite sex was confusing to say the least and you know what? It's never gotten any better.

Going to school in Ottawa was a whole heap different than in Huntsville. In Huntsville you went to your classroom and stayed put for the duration of the school day. Not so in Ottawa, you had to change teachers and classrooms for every subject. In Huntsville there was one public school so naturally it was called Huntsville Public School, in Ottawa there were many schools and the one I went to was named. J.O. Swerdfager Public School. I had one heck of a time writing all that on the little line for school on the front of my notebooks I'll tell you and what the hell kind of name for a school is J.O. Swerdfager anyway? Everytime I said it I felt like I was gonna get my mouth washed out with soap for cussin. Another difference between school in Huntsville and Ottawa was in Ottawa you had to take a foreign language, French. Well it was sure foreign to me and I couldn't understand why I needed to learn it in the first place. It wasn't like I was going to be living in Ottawa forever where a segment of the population were french speaking, heck no, Mom and Dad were going to realize their mistake and get back together, then we'd all move back to Huntsville and live happily ever after. It didn't seem that far fetched to me, I just figured they were going through a stupidity phase, you know parents. Yep, I sure didn't need to learn french, WRONG!! I now reside in a city where a goodly portion of the population are french speaking Canadians. Well one out of two wasn't bad, I was right about Mom and Dad. After living in Ottawa for about a year they did see the error of their ways, they did get back together and we did move back to good ole Huntsville. Oh happy days, uh huh.

CHAPTER TWO: GROWING UP & DRIVING PEOPLE NUTS

Once back in Huntsville my life went pretty well for awhile, a short while that is, uh huh, Mom did her Houdini bit again. Things were a tad different this time around with Mom gone. Poor Dad, if he thought things were gonna be easier because Darlene and I were older and therefore not as apt to get into trouble he was dreamin. Don't get me wrong as far as I'm concerned we weren't THAT bad, at least I wasn't, heh heh.

There was the time we brought a stray dog home. Tippy didn't mind so I don't know why good ole Dad got all bent outta shape about it, what happened wasn't our fault. Well it WASN'T! The dog was a full grown German Sheppard who we named Ketsa, (short for ketchup), I know, I know, kids eh? Anyway when Darlene and I brought Ketsa home Dad was out on a service call. Since it was our bedtime (Darlene and I were good about that at least), we left Ketsa outside tied to the back door knob because we wanted to make sure Dad saw her immediately upon arriving home and because although Tippy didn't mind Ketsa, Ketsa minded Tippy. She wanted to tear his little body to shreds.

When Dad got home a couple of hours later he saw Ketsa alright. Ketsa was one hell of a good guard dog only dear ole Dad wasn't impressed. I guess Ketsa not letting him in his own home along with growling fiercely, baring her teeth and threatening to attack may have influenced Dad's opinion a mite. Thank God we'd left her outside and tied or the results might have been even more memorable, at least for Dad. Dad's hollering, from a safe distance I might add, woke Darlene and I up and we got the situation in hand so to speak. Needless to say we didn't get to keep Ketsa but it was okay because the next morning her rightful owner showed up to claim her much to the relief of Dad not to mention Tippy.

Then there was the time I took me out to the ball game without Dad's prior consent or knowledge, however he did find out about it, boy did he and after he expressly said I couldn't go. Dad should have known better. Telling me I can't do something is paramount to waving a red flag in front of El Torro. It's a childs sacred duty to flaunt their parents authority whenever, over whatever. It says so right in The Childrens Guide To Bringing Up Parents. Anyway, I was just standing there watching the industrial league play baseball. Is it my fault some yahoo hit a foul ball, at least I thought it was pretty foul when it hit me SMUCK!!! right between the eyes. Knocked me out cold it did. As luck would have it and we ain't talkin good luck here, a friend of my Dads was standing behind me and caught me before I hit the dirt. The damn fool would've done better to catch the ball before it hit my person and did bodily harm.

I came to just as I was being loaded into Dads friends car to be taken to the hospital. Talk about having a panic attack. I didn't have anything against hospitals just a thing against dear ole Dad finding out I was at the ball game. Of course being ten years old I didn't get a say in the matter and before I knew it I was in the emergency room at the local hospital. I guess it was just as well, like Dad wasn't going to notice my two black eyes, my face swollen to twice its normal size and my broken nose, yeah right. I was good at getting myself out of trouble but not that good. Who else eh? Dad's punishment for me over that little episode was exceptionally harsh and just down right cruel. He actually made me go out in public and to school. I looked like I'd gone thirty seconds in the ring with Mohammed Ali and lost. I got stared at, laughed at and I was embarrassed beyond belief. Dad got his point across, that time. I don't know why I went to the baseball game in the first place, I don't even like baseball all that much. Yeah yeah, I know it's unamerican not to like baseball but its okay, I'm a Canadian.

On top of everything else, dear ole Dad also had to contend with Darlene's and my up and

coming entrance into the wonderful world of puberty. What a crock, wonderful my foot. Dad had the school nurse talk to Darlene and I to explain all about the changes our bodies would be going through. The nurse told us our bodies would blossom into glorious womanhood, in other words we were gonna start getting a bosom. Uh huh, that was even a bigger crock. I was ten years old then and I'm forty something now and I still don't have anything to lift, let alone separate. If you've seen my back then you've seen my front. The nurse also explained the curse, the monthlies, wrong time of the monthlies whatever, you know the menstrual thingy. Now that I wish would've been a crock, boy talk about embarrassing, the more the nurse talked about it the redder my face got. Thank God Dad had the good sense to let the nurse explain it not to mention his perfect timing. Three days after learning all about the birds and bees bit Mother Nature came a-callin.

If I hadn't known what was coming I wouldn't have known what WHAT was and I would have been absolutely terrified. As it was I had to ask Dad to go to the store and get, "some of the stuff you had the nurse at school talk to us about", stuff. When Dad got back from the store with the stuff he handed me the bag and spittin and sputterin asked me if I knew what to do with it. I said I did and headed upstairs to the bathroom with the bag. Actually I didn't have a clue what to do but I wasn't about to ask my Dad how to attach a Kotex pad to a belt. Uh uh, no way, I'd taken just about all the embarrassment over this passage into womanhood thing I could handle. Between Darlene and I we figured the how to out eventually and speaking of Darlene, do you know she didn't start her passage until a couple of years later? Talk about unfair. As far as I was concerned we were identical twins so she should of had to start puttin up with the damn menstrual thingy the same time as I did, misery loves company.

The mood swings I experienced with the onset of puberty were something I don't brag about. Just ask Dad, or Darlene, or even Tippy although he's been in that big doghouse in the sky for many years now so you might have a bit of trouble gettin a hold of him. I'd be just motorin along in first gear sitting at the dinner table with Dad and Darlene talkin about normal everyday stuff when WHAMO! I'd be in over-drive talkin a mile a minute blabberin on and on about nothing that made any sense, Motor Mouth Inc. that was me. I'm sure there were countless times Dad and Darlene contemplated committing premeditated murder on my person or just plain committing me. I'd be in high gear playing tackle football with the gang and loving every minute of it when, TA DA, I'd be reverse, throwing a real hissy fit telling the gang they were a childish bunch of dumbys and stomping off for home in a real snit. Charming eh?

Darlene was always the target of my worst wrath. Well she deserved it especially during the summer in swimming season. Every morning Darlene and I would be up early waiting for the milkman. When he'd come we'd get a quart of chocolate milk, put it in our packed the night before beach bag, meet the gang at a previously designated locale and then we'd all hitch hike out to Kinsmens Beach. Back then you could actually do that without fear of being raped, beaten or kidnapped although we could've gotten grounded if Dad had ever found out we hitch hiked. We always told him what all the other kids told their folks, we walked or got a ride with one of the other kids parents. We'd spend the day swimming, playing and laying on the beach. It was an idyllic existence for me that is until ole Mother Nature came a-callin, then while everyone else was swimming and having fun I'd be sitting off by myself sulking.

They say the menstrual thingy is part of the privilege of being a woman, well maybe for whoever in hell THEY were but personally I had no problem figuring out why some women referred to it as the curse. It sure made me curse and exceedingly cranky besides. The fact

Darlene would be swimming and having fun when I couldn't just ticked me off even more. The gang didn't buy my, "I don't feel like swimming", excuse for a minute and kept giving me weird looks like I'd sprouted a dual exhaust. I'll bet dollars to doughnuts that Darlene squealed and told them the real reason. Yes, tampons had been invented even way back then but they were a complete mystery to me besides which I had enough trouble with the damn kotex pad and belt, God knows what would've happened with something as complex as a tampon. Heh heh, I couldn't even begin to imagine Dad trying to explain that concept to me.

Another hassle between Dad and I during my early puberty was my hair. Every couple of months Dad would send Darlene and I to a local hairdresser to have our hair cut, the idea being if our hair was short it would be easier to look after. Dad was no Vidal Sasson and we weren't real talented towards hair either. You have to understand about our hair. It was naturally very curly, were talkin french poodle curly here, and stubborn. It didn't matter how often we brushed it, wet it down with water or slicked it back with goop it had a mind of it's own. Damp weather was the worst, POUF!!!, instant afro. Anyway this one time I went to the hairdressers alright but after Helen the hairdresser had cut Darlene's hair I told Helen I wasn't there for a haircut, I was there to get my hair styled in a real fancy do called a french roll. I assured Helen when she question the deviation from the norm that I had Dad's full approval, yeah right. All in all Dad took my new do pretty well. He didn't say a word about the style being years too old for me or that I looked like a little girl playing dress-up or that I looked ridiculous or that it was highly impractical, he didn't have to, one of my friends came over, took one look at my hair and burst out laughing, even Dad had trouble keeping a straight face. Amusing I might have been, amused I wasn't. Dad wasn't amused either when upon seeing the error of my way he had to pay for a return engagement at Helen's.

Not too long after my passage into womanhood, Mom and Dad got back together, again. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again and believe me my folks could be very trying, heh heh. Mom and Dad seemed to be getting along better this time and I guess they were because before very long Mom was preggers. We were all entering a new phase in our lives, Mom and Dad we going to be parents again after twelve years,(you'd think after Darlene and I they would have known better) and Darlene and I were about to enter the mysterious and oft times frightening world of teenagers, SCARIOOS.

During our teenage years the population in our hometown of Huntsville, Ontario, was approximately 5,000 during the winter months and about 20,000 during the summer months. Needless to say Huntsville was a lot of fun in the summer and in winter you hibernated until spring. Actually winter wasn't that bad, heh heh, there were choices. You could go skating at the arena on Friday nights, the teen dance at the town hall on Saturday night and bowling on Sunday night. Since Darlene and I were only allowed to go out one night per week and it either had to be Friday or Saturday our choices were somewhat limited. Of course there was one other choice although it was real iffy, you could always go parking up at The Lookout. To do that depended on if you could find a date in the first place, if he had a car in second place and if Mom and Dad didn't find out in the third place because they didn't allow us to go on car dates yet. Like I said it was really iffy.

Once when I was thirteen or fourteen years old some of my friends and I were riding around in a car owned by two brothers, Lark and Jim. We were having a lot of fun just listening to the radio and talking, honest, thats all, really. All of a sudden someone realized it was two a.m., my curfew was ten p.m., oh oh, I was in big, Big, BIG TROUBLE. When I got home I was read the

riot act backwards, forwards, sideways, left, right, upside down, right side up, right side out and inside out and got grounded for three very long months that felt like years. The injustice of it all, it wasn't like I'd been out doing God only knows what with who knows who and God only knew what what was because I sure as hell didn't know, I was still as pure as the driven snow. Anyway the next night my Mom and five of my Dad's brothers went downtown looking for the car I had come home in and after cruising Main Street for awhile they found it. The only problem besides the near fatal case of embarrassment I suffered when I heard about it was that Lark and Jim weren't in the car just their brother Bill. Bill was just sitting in the car minding his own business when all of a sudden this madwoman with five guys, five big guys I might add, as backup started hollering at him. Now really what would you do, right so did Bill. He just sat there as quiet as a little church mouse not saying a word. Now poor Bill didn't have a clue what the hell was going on or who in hell the crazy woman was either but with the backup she had it didn't matter. Finally Mom ran out of steam and with a final, "Stay away from Donna", she took her righteous indignation and Dad's five brothers and left. You want to believe Bill made tracks outta there and high-tailed it for home to ask Lark and Jim just who the hell Donna was and what the hell was going on. Lark and Jim thought the whole episode was hilarious, Bill wasn't impressed and I can't say I blame him. When Mom turns on her righteous indignation she makes a she wolf defending her young look like a soft cuddly newborn kitten. That was one of my more memorable dates, for Bill anyway and he hadn't even been there.

After that little episode my reputation was in shreds. Oh not for the usual, "she's easy", reason which was the norm back then, it was, "Don't mess with her, she's got a heap of big uncles looking out for her. You only take her out if you've got a death wish". I was about as popular as the proverbial skunk at a garden party. Mom always told me that once a girl got a bad reputation it took a very long time to live it down, she wasn't kidding. Irony ranneth rampant, my Mom was forever warning me against getting a bad reputation and she was the one responsible for mine. I can't speak from experience but to my way of thinking a bad reputation from being, "EASY" would have been preferable to the kind of bad reputation I had, at least the "EASY" girls had dates. As dear ole Mom predicted it took awhile to live down my bad rep but eventually I did and the games began.

My Mom was a caring mother even if sometimes she was a tad over-zealous. One time I had a cold which turned into something more but what I can't remember. Anyway, my Mom made what they called a mustard plaster to put over my chest to help draw out the congestion or whatever. Just after Mom put the mustard plaster on, the phone rang and she went to answer it. I in my all hot and feverish state went to sleep. Mom got talkin and forgot all about me, my cold and the mustard plaster. About half an hour later Mom remembered, she hung up the phone faster than if she'd got an obscene call and headed for my bedroom to remove the you know what. When Mom removed the offending plaster, I had a blister on my chest the entire size of the mustard plaster. Oh well, these things happen, I guess, even if it is always to me but at least I got better quick, real quick.

When I was sixteen I had to get my tonsils out. My Mom was there to give me the love and support I needed and to calm my fears. Well maybe not in body but certainly in spirit. You see Mom was so upset she over did the spirit bit a might and ended up tighter than a tick so she didn't make it to the hospital but it was okay because she sent a friend of mine instead. Now this friend was someone I had a hell of a big crush on and here I was cryin and moanin and feeling really sorry for myself because my throat hurt and to top it all off I was in the children's ward. I'll bet I

made one hell of a good impression eh? But again, these things happen. WHY ALWAYS ME?

I love to drive. I was twelve years old the first and only time I got caught by the local county mountie for driving without a license. I mean really, is it my fault I didn't have a license? Blame the idiot who made the law about being sixteen before you could drive legally. If you ask me they were just asking people to be dishonest. Anyway I lied about my age and told the officer I was thirteen. For some reason which escapes me now I thought thirteen sounded a whole lot older than twelve. The county mountie said he'd be keeping his eye on me and if I wanted to get my license when I turned sixteen then I'd better not get caught driving again. I then asked ole flatfoot where he was gonna find the time to watch for me because his busy schedule of catching naps behind highway billboards and sitting at the local truckstop drinking coffee and eating donuts sure didn't leave him with a whole lot of spare time. I thought ole flatfoot was gonna have a coronary. He was used to a lot of lip from the young punks around town but here I was a scrawny, 89 pound, under-age whatever, sassin him back and giving him grief. When I first realized I was going to be pulled over two thoughts came to mind. One, a good offense is the best defense and boy was I offensive. I had to be, the four of us in the car had all snuck out to joy ride and everyone was depending on me to get us out of our predicament. Two, baffle em with bullshit which I did admirably. I figured if ole flatfoot realized how scared we all actually were he'd delight in escorting us home where hell hath no fury like parents all riled up because their offspring weren't where they supposedly were, all tucked up in bed nice and snug and safe. Boy talk about motorvation. Well it worked, ole flatfoot let us off with just a warning, WHEW!!! If ole flatfoot had of escorted me home I'd have been grounded until the second coming or death, whichever came first. The whole incident sure scared me, mind you it didn't stop me from driving I just made darn sure I didn't get caught.

Knowing how to drive was a real necessity especially when I started dating. Back then if the twit you were out with wanted to try and get it on, he'd drive you way out in the boonies and then tell you, "Give in or walk". I did one hell of a lot of walking I tell you but only until I learned to drive then the shoe was one the other foot, literally. My date would say, "Give in or walk", and I would go into my best southern belle imitation, flutter my eyelids and reply, "Oh my, I just couldn't walk all that way back to town and it's sooo dark. Let's go over there on that little ole hunk of grass where theres more room to, well you know". Now everyone knows that when a guy's hormones kick into gear his brain goes into neutral and my dates were no exception. No siree, the twits, they'd be outta that car so fast headin for the bit of grass over yonder without suspecting a thing. GOTCHA, I'd just reach over, lock the car doors, start the engine and drive myself back to town. Heh heh, worked for me.

In winter when snow covered the ground I used a slight variation on my strategy. I'd tell my date I didn't like making whoopee with my clothes on and that I was real shy about undressing in front of him. I'd ask him real nice like to get out of the car while I crawled over into the back seat and dropped the laundry so to speak to get ready for him and that I'd honk the horn to let him know when I was ready for him to get back in the car, heh heh, it worked too. Needless to say I never had a second date with one of those bozos but they never let on to their buddies what I'd done either, I wonder why eh? At least I did manage to have a lot of first dates and I did get to practice driving a variety of vehicles.

I still remember some of the ridiculous excuses my dates used to try and get their way with me. Heh heh, there were some classics I'll bet are still in use today. Remember the standard, "If you don't let me I'll be in unbearable pain and agony"? It was the old guilt trip scenario, like its

all your fault, yeah right. Or how about, "Nothing will happen, you can't get pregnant the first time", uh huh, or my all time favorite, "Let me just put it in for a minute", that one still cracks me up. When a guy's hormones are running amok he'll say just about anything to get a girl to give in. Could you keep a straight face while a guys telling you if you don't let him do it he'll be sterile for life, I couldn't either. One guy even tried to convince me some do- hickey in his cars engine was hooked up to his penis and if I didn't let him put it in the car wouldn't start. Can you believe it? DUH, dumb or what? Now I might have been pretty inexperienced and naive as a teenager but not even I was that stupid. Or there was the guy who said his penis had caught a chill and he wanted me to let him put it in to warm it up so either he or it wouldn't catch a cold, I can't remember which. Yeah right you Yahoo, put a sock on it. Now I don't know about you but I find the mental image of a penis sneezing pretty hilarious. Anyway enough about the utter imbecility of horny adolescents and back to my love of driving.

As a teenager I was more interested in a guy's car than the guy, much to the chagrin of my girlfriends. While they were discussing how cute a guy was I'd be wondering what the chances were of him letting me drive his car. "If she drives, drive her", and "If you can't wheel her, deal her", were words I used continually. I'd drive anything, anywhere, anytime. Those were the good old days. Five or six of us would ride around at night in an old hot rod. We'd pool our resources then pull into a gas station for twenty three cents worth of gas. We could actually make it out of the station and even drive around for awhile, albeit a short while. Can you imagine pulling into a gas station today and asking for twenty three cents worth of gas? The gas jockey wouldn't even bother to turn on the pumps for that piddlin amount. He'd look at you like you'd sprouted two heads and a tail or else he'd blow a gasket from laughing. People like that have no sense of decorum, in other words they ain't got no etiquette. I guess they aren't as smart as their counterparts back when. They at least realized that the young, penniless punks they served twenty three cents worth of gas to with a smile on their face and a tiger tail giveaway were the successful businessmen their sons would be making the big bucks off of today.

Countless times when I didn't get home until after curfew I used the age old standard, "We ran out of gas", routine and ninety- nine percent of the time I wasn't just tryin to put one over on the old folks at home, we actually did run out of gas. Dad's reply was always the same, "You should have allowed time for such emergencies", and I'd get grounded anyway. Lord, I used to spend at least six months out of the year grounded. I haven't the foggiest who originally came up with the grounding bit but whomever should have been grounded in a pool of piranhas.

Grounding may have seemed the ideal solution for discipline to my parents but it sure took them a while to cotton on to it's how to and how comes which left me at times totally confused. Like one time I was in a car with some friends and we were going to a teen hangout at the next town south of Huntsville in Bracebridge. We no sooner pulled onto the main drag in Bracebridge when one of the town's law officers pulled the car over and requested our presence at the local police station and from his manner I was sure it wasn't for no social visit, it wasn't. To this day I have no idea why we were pulled over in the first place other than the officer just wanted to throw his weight around of which he had lots I might add. Anyway the officer called my parents to tell them he had me in custody.

After about an hour the officer released us and we were free to go. My friends and I decided that maybe Bracebridge wasn't the ideal place to see and be seen and we made tracks for home. All the way back to Huntsville I lived in mortal fear of what my parents were gonna do to me once I got home. I figured I'd be grounded at least until my thirtieth birthday. My friends offered

to come in with me and explain to my parents that we had done nothing wrong but I decided to go it alone. When I walked into the house, two hours before my curfew which I thought might help my case some, I braced myself for the inevitable explosion. Mom looked at me and said, "Hi jailbird", but she said it in a joking sort of way. I couldn't believe it! My folks weren't upset with me, however the police officer was a whole nother story. When he'd called my folks and they'd ascertained he was an idiot who didn't have a clue, they'd threatened him with legal action unless he released us immediately. Way to go Ma and Pa, you really told that bozo. So you see when I thought I should have been grounded I wasn't.

Another time when I WAS grounded, a guy came callin. Now this guy wasn't someone I was particularly fond of. He thought he was God's gift to whomever and whenever he kissed whomever it was all wet and slobbery, YUK. Anyway he asked me to go for a drive and I was thanking God I was grounded so I didn't have to go when Mom spoke up and said, "Go ahead dear, it's okay". Any other time Mom would have refused to even consider letting me go anywhere while I was grounded. She sure picked a great time to practice leniency. I'll bet if it had of been someone I actually liked it would have been a different scenario. No wonder I was confused eh? Maybe it was all sort of a strategic ploy my parents used just to keep me guessing or then again maybe they were ad libbing to cover their confusion, who knows, I sure as hell didn't.

The day I turned sixteen I went and got my sixty day learners permit to drive. Sixty days later I got my drivers license and I got it on the first try. All my practicing paid off even if it was illegal and they say crime doesn't pay, heh heh, just kidding. Once I became a legit driver there was no stopping me. I did all the things I'd dreamed of for sooo long, like dragging for ownerships on the quarter mile at Port Sydney which in reality was just a straight stretch of highway measured off for dragging purposes. The element of suspense added by wondering if Johnny Law was going to make a surprise appearance always enhanced the race. Dragging for ownerships at the quarter mile was a bit chancy since I was always driving a borrowed car and heaven only knows what I would have done if I'd ever lost a race but thankfully I never did, damn I was good. I guess I had a tad more motorvation than my opponents. At least I always returned a vehicle I borrowed in exactly the same shape it was in when I borrowed it except of course for the mileage which is more than I could say for my Uncle Carl.

Uncle Carl was only a few years older than me and he couldn't afford a car either. Although Unk wasn't into the draggin bit he did like to drive up and down Main Street to impress the ladies. Now lets face it, an old C.C.M. bicycle with mirrors mounted on the handlebars and red, white and blue streamers hangin out of the handlegrips just didn't cut any ice with the eligible ladies of Unk's acquaintance. One evening my Mom graciously allowed Uncle Carl to use her little, blue Morris to go cruisin. Now Mom's Morris was her pride and joy and Dad's favorite toy. Dad used to get a big kick out of hiding it on Mom. Yeah, he did. One time Mom came rushing out of the house to hop into her car and go do some errands and NO CAR. Heh heh, Dad had hidden it on the front lawn. Our front lawn was terraced and you had to get up over two little but steep hills to get to the level part of the lawn. There wasn't even a walkway to it and you could barely see the front porch if you were standing in the driveway. Needless to say, no- one ever used the front door. The car looked absolutely ridiculous sitting up there. When Mom saw where Dad had hidden her car she was a tad upset and started hollerin at him to get it down. Since Dad had got his intended reaction from Mom not to mention a big kick out of the whole thing if the grin on his face was anything to go by, he went up and brought the car back down. In

between chuckles while bringing it down Dad made varoom, varoom noises like little boys do when playing with hot wheels cars and the likes. I told you it was Dad's favorite toy.

Anyway the morning after Uncle Carl had borrowed Mom's car she came out to find it had undergone some cosmetic surgery during the night. The car I mean, not Mom. There were blue sex lights or more commonly referred to as whore lures, wired into the car and mounted on both sides of the windshield and a string of dingle balls hanging all around the roof of the interior. I don't know who Unk had been trying to impress with his handiwork but it sure wasn't Mom. I was definitely impressed but then what the hell did I know? I thought he showed a lot of initiative and a lot more nerve than he should have. I don't know how long it took Uncle Carl to do his interior decorating but I bet he sure as heck got it out of there a lot faster than when he put it in. Mom made sure of that.

Also high on my list of priorities when I got my drivers license was cruisin Main Street. See and be seen. I'd crank up the radio and drive up and down Main Street at least a hundred times a night doin wheelies and just driving, driving everyone nuts that is. Having no money meant I couldn't afford my own set of wheels, well maybe the wheels but certainly not a whole car so I had to beg to borrow a car from friends and family, I was merciless. My cousin Eddie had one hot Pontiac and I wanted to drive that car above all others. I haunted Eddie day and night. He kept saying no-one knew how to drive his car but him, uh huh. Finally I made Eddie an offer he couldn't refuse. He was to let me behind the wheel and if I couldn't drive his car I would buy his gas for one month and wash the car twice a week for one year. It was put up or shut up time and Eddie put his car up to shut me up just like I figured he would. Eddie sat in the passenger seat with a smug look on his mug while four of his buddies made snide remarks from the back seat. Eddie sure lost the smug offa his mug right quick when I double clutched outta second gear into third. Like I'd never heard of double clutchin before, eh cousin Eddie? The poor twit never realized it was a done deal even before I got behind the wheel. I only bet on sure things. It pays to pay attention to little details for something as important as the fifty bucks cousin Eddie paid me for the bet and the use of his hot car for a whole weekend. The great feeling I got from out-witting and out-maneuvering cousin Eddie was one hell of a bonus besides. So much for stupid women drivers.

Just after I got my drivers license I was in one hell of an accident. This kumkwat who worked for my Dad had just bought his first and what should have been his last car the way he drove and wanted to try it out. Darlene and I piled into the car and we headed for the teen hangout in Bracebridge (you'd have thought by now I'd have learned NOT to go there) to have a wobbly pop, we didn't get there. Things were going great until ole kumkwat decided to drag against another friend heading for the hangout too. Kumkwat lost it when he inadvertantly hit the shoulder of the road. We were travelling at 118 miles per hour when the car rolled over and played dead and we weren't. There wasn't a shred of glass left on the car anywhere. We crawled out where the windshield had been. The car had been a big, ole, heavy Chrysler which was probably what saved us. If it had of been one of the lightweight models that are so popular today we'd in all likelihood have been pushing up daisies. The accident taught me two very important lessons. Firstly, it can happen to me. Instead of making me nervous it made me even more determined to be a good driver and a good driver doesn't risk anyone's life but her own.

The second lesson I learned was how to drive a standard. Oh I could drive a standard already as far as I was concerned but not as far as Dad was concerned, not to his satisfaction that is. You see Dad's insurance wouldn't cover ole Crash Kumkwat after the accident so I had to drive him

back and forth on various jobs. Now dear ole Dad had his own way of getting a point across, like when I was twelve years old and Mom had given me permission to smoke at home. Dad didn't smoke and he certainly didn't approve of me smoking but as Mom had already said okay he just let the matter drop and I stupidly thought the matter was settled. I should have known better. One night a couple of weeks later I had some of my friends over to my house. I was smoking up a storm and sort of lording it over everybody because none of their parents would let them smoke. I thought I was real cool. Dad walked in and there was instant silence, everyone was waiting to see if my Dad would say anything about me smoking. Dad looked over at me puffing away on a cigarette and said, "You look like a horses ass sucking wind". So much for being cool, like I said Dad had his own way of getting his point across.

Dad took me out in one of his trucks to teach me the fine art of driving a vehicle with a standard transmission. He had me drive halfway up one of the steepest hills in town and stop right smack dab in the middle of the road. So there I was, stopped halfway up this darn hill with a line-up of cars behind me, their drivers honking their horns and probably thinking, "Stupid woman driver, why the hell did she stop on the middle of the hill?" Dad said to that's why. When Dad said to do something you did it. Ours wasn't to reason why it was do it or die. Dad turned to me with his "lets see you get out of this one" look on his face and I stupidly asked him, "What should I do now?". Dad said he didn't know but that I'd better do something quick as the drivers behind me were getting pretty riled. He then pointed out that if I let the truck roll back when I took my foot off the clutch I'd hit the vehicle behind me and if I didn't let the clutch out properly I'd stall the truck. Nice Dad, real nice, thank you for sharing that. Well I tried but Dad made me so nervous, everytime I let the clutch out nice and easy and slowly pressed the gas pedal the damn truck stalled. After I'd stalled the truck a half dozen times Dad looked over at me and said, "DONNA" in a tone of voice that meant unless I got it together right quick I'd be wearing out a lot of shoe leather instead of rubber. Boy talk about motorvation, I popped the clutch and floored the gas pedal on that baby. I must of laid fifty feet of rubber but as I pointed out to dear ole Dad after he started breathing again, the truck didn't roll back and I didn't stall it again. I guess Dad figured he'd gotten his point across because there endeth the lesson.

Dad also had a way of gettin at the truth of a matter whether you wanted him to or not and believe me most times I definitely didn't want. If you told Dad something and he didn't believe you he'd just look at you and say, "Tell me a little story". I remember once he didn't believe something I told him and three years later he was still saying, "Tell me a little story". Boy talk about persistence but Dad's persistence does pay off eventually, it only took twenty two years for me to tell him about sneaking out that night when I was twelve and getting stopped by the county mountie for driving without a license.

Don't get me wrong my Dad is a great guy. He's intelligent and has an uncanny knack for understanding human behaviour. The lessons Dad taught me along the way have stayed with me throughout the years as Dad had a way of reinforcing his lessons from time to time which was unique. I think the legal term for it is extortion or maybe its blackmail but whatever it was it sure as hell worked. One time my Mom had been really sick due to allergies and ended up in the hospital. Dad decided my younger sister's cat wasn't helping Mom's allergies and wanted to get rid of it before Mom was released from the hospital. He got me to take the cat to the local Humane Society and tell them it was a stray. Dad simply told my sister April the cat had run away cause if she'd known the truth she would have thrown a real hissy fit. For years afterwards whenever Dad wanted me to do something I didn't want to do and I'd give him grief about it he'd

simply say, "If you don't do it I'll tell April what really happened to her cat and she'll beat the living you know what outta you". Not that Dad would really have told her, he just used the threat to get me to behave, at least I don't think he would have, would he, naw, well maybe, naw I'm sure he wouldn't have. Oh it's okay I told my sister myself a couple of months ago and she wasn't even upset, WHEW, of course the fact it's been thirty years since I did the deed may have accounted for April's lack of incentive to do my body harm. Dad sure got a lot of mileage outta that one. Damn he's good.

I never really understood what the great depression was all about but I do know when I was growing up we didn't have any money and it sure as hell depressed me. To start with we lived at the west end of town which was considered the wrong side of the tracks so to speak by the folks who lived at the east end of town. Don't get me wrong, the kids from the east end had a lot more problems than us west end kids. Kids from the east end had to decide things like, what colour hair streaks to have their stylist (barber or hairdresser to us west endies) apply or what shade imported sweater to add to their collection next or even more importantly what colour shoes to buy that week. We kids from the west end didn't have near as many problems, heck no, the only thing we really had to worry about was where our next meal was coming from. The kids from the east end had this real thing about portraying a certain image, not so for us west end kids, we couldn't afford an image, certain or otherwise.

While one parent families are commomplace today when I was growing up they weren't. The east end kids looked down on me because my folks had been separated a couple of times. I mean they looked down on me anyway but even moreso because my Mom hadn't been around before even though she was now. Now if my Mom had of been dead that would have been acceptable but since she was still alive and had just living somewhere else that was totally unacceptable. So in other words my mother had to have been dead when she wasn't around before the east end kids would accept me and then they wouldn't have accepted me anyway because I wasn't suitably geographically situated so what was their point in looking down on me because my Mom in the first place? How's that for a code to live by? It rated right on up there with brussel sprouts and I hated brussel sprouts.

When my Mom wasn't around my friends from the west end never questioned my family situation, too bad the old biddies in the neighborhood weren't as considerate. Back then I was taught to respect my elders no matter how stupid they were so when some nosy ole gossip would ask about my Mom I'd have to give her an answer. Now trying to explain something you don't understand yourself is like trying to put a condom on a rattlesnake and why would you want to anyway? That's when my imagination would kick in, I'd simply tell anyone insensitive enough to ask that Mom had run off with the milkman. You have to understand that the milkman was the embodiment of Icahbod Cain of The Legend Of Sleepy Hollow fame only a whole lot skinnier and ten times as homely, YUK. Mom was a foxy blonde, the idea of her running off with him was as ridiculous as the question being asked in the first place. Them ole biddies sure caught on right quick, they only asked once.

Ever notice how teenagers aren't all that bright? Well I was no exception. I was about as bright as an ole hound dog who'd swim clear across a river to get a drink of water. When I turned sixteen I quit school. I thought I was being smart and real cool, the fact I hadn't even got out of grade nine didn't mean diddley squat. I knew it all, uh huh. Who needed an education when I could work full time at one of the local restaurants as a waitress and make a whole eighty-five cents an hour. Boggles the mind eh? Why I'd figured I'd be a millionairess in no time or at the

very least be able to get my own apartment and a had to have it, want it more than anything in the world, to die for car of my very own. I got the to die for part right. Do you know how much hard work waitressing is? My arches fell so far they were six feet under and waiting for the rest of me to come on down. It didn't take me long to figure out I wasn't going to accumulate any great amount of wealth as a waitress at least not in this lifetime or the next or even the one after that and I was good, super waitress, that was me. I could serve whole tables in a single bound, clear tables faster than a speeding bullet and what did I get for all my efforts, lousy hours, cranky customers and a paycheck that was the pitts. Reality reared it's ugly ole head and I didn't like it, not one little bit. The worst part was having to admit Mom and Dad had been right when they'd urged me to stay in school and get an education. That's a teenagers worst nightmare, actually having to admit his or her parents were right and they were wrong, oh the humiliation. My parents were pretty cool about the whole thing and even offered to pay my way to take a hairdressing course or something because believe it or not I still didn't want to go back to high school. I was still in stupid mode and still trying to prove I knew it all despite knowing nothing.

I considered Mom and Dad's offer, no seriously I did but my stupid streak must have been a mile wide because I refused. You see I had met a guy, not just any guy, my future husband, Smiley. I thought Smiley was my dreams acomin true. Smiley was oh so polite and a little shy at times. He had light, brown curly hair, blue eyes and a killer smile. He also had a good job and a car which he let me drive whenever I wanted to, I was impressed.

I met Smiley a little while after his sisters, Hefty One and Hefty Two, moved in across the road from my house with their grandmother. I feel I must point out the fact my Mother inadvertantly had my future husband arrested shortly before I met him. It seemed my future husband and his sisters liked to party hardy. One night while engaged in partying hardily across the road the noise level got a little above and beyond acceptable limits, namely Mom's and she called the local law enforcement agency to complain. When Huntsville's finest investigated Mom's complaint they discovered Smiley right in the midst of the to-do, pissy- faced drunk and being thoroughly obnoxious. Needless to say Smiley ended up being an overnight guest of the local constabulary. They sort of took exception to some of the adjectives and proper nouns Smiley directed at them. If nothing else his speech was colorful not to mention crude. I guarantee he didn't learn the words he used to describe the officers from a Readers Digest, Towards More Picturesque Speech, article. Like mother, like daughter, is an expression commonly used and was especially true when my Mom called the police about Smiley but you'll read about that later on.

Smiley's courtship of me wasn't without its share of unforgettable moments. When Smiley and I first started dating I tried real hard to fit in with his way of life. One time he had a party at his parent's place where he lived and he called me up to see what kind of alcohol I drank so he could have some on hand for me at the party. I thought he was so kind, thoughtful and considerate. I didn't want to appear to be a prude so even though I didn't drink I told him I drank gin. That night at the party I pulled Smiley's mother aside (she was one super nice lady) and I explained my dilemma to her. She told me to just accept the drinks her son mixed for me and then unobtrusively pass them to her and she would get rid of them for me. Alright, my problem was solved. Yeah right, as usual Murphy's Law was about to be enacted. As Smiley kept mixing me drinks he added more and more alcohol to each drink. He thought he was doing pretty good. He figured he could get me drunk and then he'd get a roll in the hay, heh heh, he got a roll alright but it wasn't in the hay. Things kind of got out of hand when Smiley's mother fell off her chair.

Smiley realized I'd been giving his mother my drinks and I realized his mother had been drinking the drinks instead of pitching out a window like I thought she'd been doing. Smiley wasn't smiling, he stormed out the door, got in his car, took off down the road and rolled his car over into a ditch. Some people just have no sense of HA HA.

Another memorable time was when Smiley and I were in his car at the A&P parking lot in Huntsville. Smiley was waiting to pull out onto Main Street and he and I were arguing about something or other, I can't remember exactly what it was but I do know whatever it was I was in the right. Smiley's, I am man hear me roar attitude was annoying me no end so I took matters into my own hands, literally. I reached over, turned the motor off pitched the car keys out of Smiley's partially open window, got out of the car and hoofed er fer home. Poor Smiley, he had a line-up of cars behind him including a police cruiser and he had to get out of his car and feel around in the snow for his car keys. A smart person would have known better than to pull a holier than thou attitude on me and a spare set of car keys wouldn't have been amiss either.

Another time when Smiley and I and some of our friends stopped at a take-out restaurant to get some pop he asked me to get him an orange pop. Always when we stopped to get something it was me who had to run in and get it and it was really startin to get on my nerves. This particular time Smiley gave me detailed instructions as to the size of orange pop he wanted. He said I always got him one that was too large, uh huh, that made me even more teed off. Smiley should have known better than to mess with me but some people are just naturally slow. When I returned to the car and handed Smiley his orange pop I thought he was going to blow a gasket. I'd had the waitress put it in one of those little, round, plastic, individual, coffee creamer containers. Our friends thought it was hilarious although Smiley wasn't real impressed but I got my point across.

I realize my portrayal of Smiley's and my courtship doesn't sound very appealing and there is a very good reason for that, it wasn't. It seemed all Smiley wanted to do was party hardy and consume enormous amounts of alcohol. Everytime we went out Smiley ended up in the same shape as the alcohol he drank, ninety proof. Now I had never had a whole lot of experience around people who drank and I thought Smiley was just sowing his wild oats or whatever and figured he'd settle down after he got married so when after about six months of dating Smiley popped the question I said yes. I was still in stupid mode and still trying to prove I knew it all despite knowin nothin.

Mom and Dad didn't approve of Smiley, wonder why eh? Anyway I told them it was my life and I was going to marry him besides I had this oh so romantic scenario all worked out of how it would be when Smiley and I were husband and wife. For one thing while Smiley was at work making lots of lovely money I could take the car and drive around to my hearts content. Now don't get the wrong idea here, yes, I did love to drive but I wasn't just marrying Smiley so I'd get the unlimited use of his car. I mean it wasn't as if my parents wouldn't let me use their vehicles because they did albeit not very often. The truth is I didn't like to use Mom or Dad's vehicle because I was always afraid something would happen to it while I was driving it especially in the case of Dad's truck, he needed it to do his job and inadvertantly Mom's car too because if Dad's truck broke down he'd use Mom's car as backup. My fears were not unfounded. One time while Dad was out of town for the day he let me use his truck. I was so elated about having the use of a vehicle for a whole day. I picked up a few of my friends and we drove around for hours. Then someone got the brilliant idea to go out to this certain place we'd all heard about but never been too. It was somewhere way out in the boonies. You know how people describe someone as

being easily led, well it's me they're referring to. To make a long story short we ended up way out in the middle of nowhere stuck up to the axles in mud. Luckily some fishermen came along and towed us out of the mud, however, the track I had come in on was really narrow and naturally there was no way I could turn the truck around to drive out so I had to back the truck up for miles. At least I got to perfect my driving skills in reverse, heh heh, who else eh? Anyway you should have seen that truck when I got it back to civilization. It was completely covered in mud. If Dad ever saw his truck in the shape it was in he'd have thrown a hissy fit to end all hissy fits. Huntsville didn't have such a thing as an automatic car wash so I automatically got busy with buckets of soapy water, a pile of old rags, a water hose and one heck of a lot of elbow grease. By the time I finished up that ole truck was sparklin. When Dad got home he was really pleased about how his truck looked and praised me for taking such good care of it and being so responsible, if he only knew.

Like I said, there were other reasons why I married Smiley although theres a lot to be said for the aforementioned one. We would live in a cute little house with all nice furnishings, Smiley would go off to work everyday while I would be the perfect little housewife keeping our little nest clean and cosy. I would be mistress in my own home with no parents yelling about curfews, (I particularly liked that one) and I could have my friends over visiting whenever I wanted to. Then of course came the most important reason of all, love. I loved Smiley or at least I thought it was love, maybe it was just a reasonable facsimile. Anyway I thought by marrying Smiley I was going to have it all, uh huh.

CHAPTER THREE: LOVE, HONOUR & WHAT?

The perfect marriage is when two people care enough about each other to share mutual trust, respect and understanding. Ideally a couple discusses things openly, make important decisions to their mutual satisfaction and if there is an issue they can't resolve they at least agree to disagree amicably. My marriage to Smiley wasn't anything like that. When the minister said, "For better, for worse", he should have said, "For better or worse", at least then I would have had a choice. I didn't have a problem when the minister said, "Love, honour and", but I sure as hell had a problem with "OBEY". I'll bet dollars to donuts it was a man who came up with that little gem so he could keep the "little woman" in line. Smiley's and my wedding day was a harbinger of what our marriage was, a total disaster.

First off, a girl I'd known died after giving birth and the funeral for my friend and her baby was the afternoon of the night I got married. I was heartbroken. Needless to say I wasn't exactly in an appropriate wedding mood even if it was my own. Our wedding was a small intimate affair held in the minister's living- room. Hefty One and Marv, hubby-to-be's best bud stood up for us. I was really upset to find Smiley's parents weren't at the wedding. I couldn't understand it as I knew Smiley's mother had gone and spent money she couldn't afford on a new dress, her first one in years. When I asked Smiley why his parents weren't there he told me they hadn't wanted to come. I mean there I was already bummed out and then that on top of it all, I didn't think things could get any worse but stupid me what was I thinking, the night was still young and Murphy was waitin in the wings.

When it was time to start the ceremony my Mom, Dad, sister and brother-in-law sat on the minister's couch. The minister stood in front of the couch with his back to my folks and Smiley and I stood facing the minister with Hefty and Marv on either side of us. The minister started, " We are gathered on this solemn occasion " and Darlene stuck out her tongue and made ridiculous faces and I of course started laughing. The minister wasn't impressed, he couldn't see what my idiot family were doing. When the minister got to the part, " Can anyone here show just cause why this couple should not be joined ", my Dad made like he was going to stand up. Now I was used to my families antics, after all I'd been observing them for eighteen years, Smiley however wasn't. Heck, when my Dad walked my twin down the aisle for her second marriage he'd told her husband-to-be who was standing with the minister, " This is the second time, don't bring her back ". I don't know who was more shocked, the bridegroom, Daniel, or the minister.

When my Dad had started to rise, Smiley almost passed out from shock. Smiley was one of those people who has no sense of ha ha whatsoever which is probably one of the numerous reasons we are no longer married. A good sense of humour is a must especially if your married to me, your gonna need it.

A perfect example of a good sense of humour is our local pharmacist. One day Dad who is an oil burner mechanic was doing a job at the local pharmacy. Our pharmacist has always displayed a wry sense of humour but this day he outdid himself. When Dad entered the drugstore he took off his rubber boots as he didn't need them on while working inside. When he'd completed the job, Dad went to the door to put on his rubbers only to find they were gone. When Dad questioned the pharmacist as to the whereabouts of his rubbers he was told with a little chuckle that his rubbers were right where he'd left them and to look again. Upon closer inspection Dad discovered two condoms sitting where his rubbers had been.

Anyway, after the wedding ceremony we went outside to get in our cars and go to my parents house for a little celebration party. I was surprised to find Smiley's parents standing outside of the

minister's house. They had come to congratulate us, however they refused to accompany us to the celebration party. I just couldn't understand it. I didn't know what to think, I'd always thought Smiley's parents had liked me. We had the celebration at my parent's and then my new Hubby and I left to spend the night at a local motel. No real honeymoon for us, heck no, Hubby didn't think it was necessary. The motel we went to was one owned by a friend of my Dad's. When we told him we wanted a room he just laughed and told me I'd better get myself home immediately or he'd call my Dad and tell him what I was up to. He just wouldn't take my word for it that Smiley and I were actually married. He finally called my Dad. Dad confirmed the fact Smiley and I were indeed married so we eventually did get a room for the night. By now I was really in a mood and it wasn't a good one. It sure hadn't been the wedding day I'd always dreamed of, as a matter of fact it didn't bear any resemblance to what I thought my wedding day would be like. Smiley wasn't in a very good mood either after I told him, " Not tonight dear, I've got one hell of a headache ". Well I did and was it any wonder, I'd buried my girlfriend and her baby, been snubbed by my new in-laws and been told there was no room at the inn so to speak. I'm a staunch believer in Murphy's Law and Murphy must have got a whole whack of overtime that day.

The next day Smiley and I moved into the ole place his parents lived in as per prior arrangement. Day one of my marriage and reality was already rearing it's ugly head. I was starting to get the idea that maybe my idea of what my married life would be like was just a tad over estimated. So much for having our own cosy little home or any privacy either for that matter. Hubby's parents lived in a wooden, two-storied structure with a rusty metal roof. You couldn't call it a house, that would have been stretching the truth (we're talkin super duper elasticity here). "Thou shalt not bear false witness", GOD, 9th Commandment, Exodus 20, The Good Book. The central heating in the structure was an old, black, cast iron, wood cookstove. The running water was supplied by someone, (usually me) running a quarter of a mile down the road to the well and hauling it back in buckets. The toilet was a double header located fifty-two feet back of the structure and the sink was a chipped enamel basin which you drained by pitching the contents out the so-called window. It was important to remember to take the cardboard out of the window first. Funny I had always associated the word window with glass but then what did I know, I was actually going to take up residence there. At least if someone got mad and told you to, "Pick a window, your leavin", you didn't have to worry about getting cut by any glass.

The lighting was designed by Haphazard Inc. Bare wires in random order graced the walls with light bulbs hanging out of sockets attached to the ends. At least you didn't have to worry about tearing out a wall to fix or replace faulty wiring. The wallpaper throughout was gathered in big clumps in some spots, non- existent in others and full of holes everywhere else. By now you should have a fair idea of the structure we were to live in. Homey eh? Although I've always been an advocate of the, "Just Say No" campaign against drugs and alcohol that place could have converted me. I sure could have used some false courage while residing under that particular roof. Reality had struck me right smack in the face again, there was no way in hell I was gonna invite my friends to visit me there and even if I'd wanted to we lived twenty-five miles from town and most of my friends didn't have transportation.

On our first night there, Smiley and I were sitting side by side at the kitchen table and I leaned over to give him a kiss, a harmless little peck on the cheek. Well it might of been harmless to Hubby but I almost lost the entire left side of my face. You see Hubby had a humongous, German Sheppard type dog and when I leaned over to kiss Hubby the dog thought I was attacking

Hubby and leaped to his rescue, growlin and a-snarlin with his huge fangs bared. Boy talk about bein all shook up, the king would have been proud. By the way that was Hubby's dogs name too.

Things were a little awkward for me at first living with Hubby's parents because of my lack of understanding as to why they had refused to participate in our wedding at the last minute. One day about three weeks later, Smiley's Mom and I were home alone and I got up the nerve to ask her why she had refused to attend our wedding. Her answer shocked hell outta me. The only reason they hadn't come was because their son, my new husband had told them if they came to the wedding or the party afterward there wouldn't be a wedding. I couldn't believe it. Hubby was ashamed of his family. To make matters worse, Smiley's Mom made me promise not to say anything to her son. She was actually afraid of what would happen. If I'd have been smart I'd have walked out right there and then. However I was still in stupid mode I guess and I just stayed put and kept my mouth shut which wasn't an easy task for me. I was full of righteous indignation over the unfairness of it all but I was determined to make my marriage work.

The reason I wanted to make my marriage work was a simple one, simple-minded one that is. My Mom had been married twice and my Mom's Mom, Granny Haslam had been married twice, sort of. I say sort of because Granny divorced her first husband and married the man I knew as Grampa Haslam. When Grampa Haslam died, Granny married her first husband again. So she had three marriages but only two husbands I guess, or maybe it's three marriages and three husbands but if husband one and three are the same person, oh hell, you figure it out. I really wanted to be the one whose marriage lasted. I was gonna make it work come hell or high water. Well the hell was no problem, Hubby had that part down pat right from day one.

It takes two to make a marriage work and I ended up being a soloist. Hubby wouldn't discuss anything with me. If I confronted him on an issue he'd just head for the nearest bar. When Hubby was sober he was a very nice person, when he was under the influence he was mean, real mean. All it took was a few beers to change my nice, mild-mannered Hubby into a man of steel, hard-headed, totally unreasonable and just down right cruel, we ain't talkin no superman here, believe me. When Hubby was drinking he had amazing recall abilities. He'd recall everyone he'd ever had a grudge against even if it was back in kindergarten and woebetide that person if he happened to get within Hubby's range during a drinking bout. Boy talk about carrying a grudge, but you can only carry a grudge so far and then all hell breaks loose as Hubby found out but thats farther along so stay tuned.

I did try to understand Hubby's point of view about drinking but I just couldn't seem to get onto his wavelength, thank heavens. One time shortly after we were married I joined Hubby on one of his regular outings to where else, a hotel and I was determined to have a good time. I had a few brew, three to be exact but I didn't like the taste so I drank them real fast to get rid of them and also to appease Hubby as he was always accusing me of thinking myself too good to drink with him. I ended up totally pissy-faced. I never was much of a drinker and I don't reckon I ever will be. I'm pretty certain I'm one of those people they refer to as a cheap drunk. Anyway, I'd had a few words with my Mother earlier in the day and in my highly inebriated state I thought it would be a good time to call her up and give her a piece of my mind. Luckily my Mother wasn't home. As I was walking back across the parking lot of the hotel from the pay phone I tripped over a rock and fell down. I'm not exactly a graceful drunk. When the rock started to walk away I realized it wasn't a rock, brilliant or what? I'm not a real bright drunk either. It was a turtle, the rock was a turtle. I thought it would make a cute pet so I picked it up and took it back into the hotel with me. Hubby wasn't amused. He didn't think it was the least bit cute and told me I

couldn't keep it. The fact it was a snapping turtle may have influenced Hubby's decision somewhat. Hubby instructed me to take Snapper outside and let him go. Needless to say I took him outside and let him go, the turtle I mean not Hubby but if I had known then what I know now it definitely would have been the other way around. If nothing else I was an obedient wife, heh heh.

There were five people in the car when we left the hotel. Hubby and his best bud Marv occupied the front seat. Marv was also the designated driver which in those days referred more to the fact he owned the car than to whether or not he drank which I might add he did. Hubby still hadn't replaced the car he'd rolled over when we were dating so we had to depend on other people for transportation. Reality was rearing it's ugly head yet again. The only driving I got to do was the wheelbarrow I used to haul wood and water. I sat in the back seat wedged between Hubby's sisters, Hefty One and Hefty Two. About halfway home Hefty One suddenly let loose with one God Awful, ear piercing scream and all hell broke loose. Marv hit the brakes. I'll bet he left twenty thousand miles worth of rubber on the road gettin his car stopped, both front and rear doors opened in unison and everybody bailed out, everybody but me that is. Such a fuss and all over a little turtle, yep, my turtle, Snapper. Now I did take the turtle outside earlier as per Hubby's instructions and I did let it go, again as per Hubby's instructions only I let it go right into the back seat of Marv's car. Hubby never specified where outside to let Snapper go, little details like that no matter how inconsequential they may seem are important. Hubby never did catch onto that fact and Lord knows I gave him numerous opportunities. Boy did Hubby give me what for over that little episode. I thought my reason for wanting to keep Snapper was a good one at the time, of course I was drunk at the time. You see I thought maybe Snapper would defend me against King, you know, clamp onto his snout or paw and forget to let go sort of thing. I figured King would be so busy with Snapper he'd forget about my face and the fact he kept trying to rip it off. Yeah well what can I say, I was drunk. All in all the whole episode turned out quite well considering, I got to keep Snapper and although Hubby sulked for a few days he did eventually get over it especially when I decided not to try and keep him company on his little jaunts to the local watering holes anymore. It takes a special breed to sit at a bar night after night spending all his paycheck and ignoring his loved ones and Hubby was one of them, a real donkey. I never could or would fit into the category of being that stupid to believe Hubby's lifestyle was an acceptable way of life no matter how hard Hubby tried to make it happen. I couldn't convince Hubby there was life beyond beer. So much for me thinking Smiley would change after our marriage, as a matter of fact Smiley actually thought I should be the one changing, can you believe it? Boy he had his nerve. I don't know who in hell Hubby thought he was but one thing was certain, he sure wasn't who I thought he was.

Now I may have givin you the mistaken impression that Hubby spent all his time at local bars during the early part of our marriage but he didn't, heck no. Every Saturday night Hubby stayed home with me and the couple of dozen other people who'd stop over to party. It was a real riot, literally. Once Hubby and his buddies got an ample supply of alcohol under their belts they'd get rowdy and then someone would say the wrong thing to the wrong person and the fightin fools would go at it. I always ended up in my room crying, terrified at what was going on downstairs. It happened every Saturday night but I never got used to it. How Hubby and his buddies could beat hell out of one another every week and still be friends was beyond me. Those people were strange, really strange.

Everybody, whether they care to admit it or not have fears. The only exceptions were Adam

and Eve and even that was only temporary. Once the slithering serpent spoke with a forked tongue to put his two cents worth in and Eve did the apple bit with Adam all hell broke loose. Whoever said a little knowledge was dangerous sure knew what they were talkin about. Normally homo sapiens fit into one of three catagories when dealing with their fears. Number one is Mr. Macho. He goes around bragging to all and sundry about how he isn't afraid of nothin or no-one. Uh huh, try sneaking up behind him and saying, "BOO!!!". While your rolling on the floor laughing at his reaction you'd better pray you can run faster scared than he can mad cause when he comes to he's gonna be real ticked off.

Number two is a middle of the road type of person, Mr. Maybe. He will admit to being afraid of certain things but only if some one else does first and only if it suits his purpose which varies depending upon who he's trying to impress. You know the type, he'll be shootin the breeze with some of his buddies and one of them will mention something like while laying under his car fixing something or other a snake came along either to take a look see or give a second opinion and it startled him. Uh huh, in other words it scared the hell outta him. Then Mr. Maybe says it would startle him too therefore letting him fit in with the crowd. Ever notice how people in category two use the word startle instead of scared? Maybe they think startled makes them appear less wimpy and more hefty. Oh well, why burst their little bubbles. Anyway, an hour or so later this same dude that agreed with his buddy that snakes startle him too is telling some dudette that snakes are harmless little critters, they are nothing to be afraid of and the sudden appearance of one wouldn't bother him in the least. Yeah, righty- o, try sneaking up behind him and screaming in a high pitched voice, "Oh my God, look down by your feet. Where did that snake come from? Look at the size of that sucker. Is it poisonous?". Any bets on how far the dude runs before he finally decides he's out of danger? I'll bet he'll be running so fast his pants will be dry before he stops. You'll notice people in category two aren't what you'd call real decisive or honest, somewhat like politicians.

Now the people in category three are total twits. They unlike the people in category two are very honest and decisive. They readily admit their fears and they'll tell you exactly what scares them, EVERYTHING. Mr. Total Twit is the guy who while trying his darnedest to get out of the path of a black cat gets hit by a car driven by an elderly couple from Iowa who haven't left the farm in twenty years but decided today was the day to visit the big city. Murphy's Law was written for people in category three. Mr. Total Twit is easily recognizable. He always wears a long scarf wrapped around his neck. Le Scarf is his blankey, his protection against the evil ole world. Mr. Total Twit pulls his scarf up to cover three quarters of his face when he's out in public so he won't catch any nasty ole germs. Ever notice he's always the one that catches a cold? He also uses his scarf to cover his ears in case of a loud noise, to hold up his pants when his suspenders snap, to muffle his screams when terrified and in extreme situations he can tie it atop his head so the ends resemble rabbit ears, drop down on all fours and hop right on outta wherever. Don't laugh it works. Would you hit a guy doing something that ridiculous? Let me tell you, it takes a lot of nerve to make that big a fool out of ones- self. Out of the three categories Mr. Total Twit is my favorite. How can you not love someone whos so totally twiticised he's adorable?

I happily don't really fit into any of the above mentioned categories. Its seldom that I do anything which is considered within THE NORM and in all likelihood I never will. I usually have a plan in mind just in case I have to face one of my fears (I do have one or two) and as usual in the case of most of my well laid plans it doesn't do me one damn bit of good. Take snakes,

yeah you take em because they absolutely terrify me.

Good ole Hubby thought he was a Mr. Macho and I strongly stress thought. He was constantly chiding me about my fear of snakes. Now Hubby and his family had some really and I mean REALLY weird notions. Some of them were right wacko, I'm referring to both the family and the notions here. Hubby's Aunt Mary was a perfect example. Everytime she had a stiff neck she'd just head on out to the garden, grab some poor unsuspecting garter snake and wrap it around her neck. Now I'd heard about how different parts of animal innards and such were used by different peoples to make healing remedies and aphrodisiacs but the whole animal and alive? It's a good job a boa constrictor wasn't called for, you might get it around your neck okay but just try getting it to let go. Anyway, Aunt Mary would hold the snake around her neck for a few minutes and then let it loose. She truly believed that come sundown the snake wherever it was would go rigid and die and her stiff neck would be gone. Like I said, right wacko. The foul smelling liniment she plastered on her neck was what took the stiffness away not the blasted snake but try telling her that. I tried but I couldn't get close enough because of the smell from the liniment, heh heh.

As I said, Mr. Macho was always putting me down because of my fear of snakes. Once he got someone else to hold a live snake in my face and tried to get me to actually touch it. Mr. Macho held onto me so I couldn't get away so I did the only thing I could do under the circumstances, I fainted. Yep, if all else fails, faint. Worked for me, dear ole Hubby felt so remorseful for being a number one jerk he didn't make me carry water or pile wood for a whole week.

After living with Hubby's parents for about a year, Hubby and I relocated out of town to a place called Marten River where Hubby got a job as a sawyer in a lumber mill. Yippee, my life was sure to get better now even though Hubby still insisted we spend weekends at his parents place. While spending the weekend with his parents Hubby would go out and party hardy. Remember when I told you earlier that you could only carry a grudge so far and that Hubby eventually found that out? Well eventually was now. One weekend, five guys he was partying with slipped some sort of drug into Hubby's drink. When the drug immobilized Hubby the five guys settled their own grudge. Hubby looked like a box of crayolas. He was black, blue, red, purple, yellow and real thick all around from all the swelling. I'd like to say I felt bad about what happened to him but I didn't, so I won't. What goes around comes around and this time it did with a vengeance. For about six months after, Hubby only visited his parents during daylight hours and never stayed around after dark. Hubby was scared. The hunter had become the hunted and Hubby didn't like the role reversal one little bit. Me, I didn't mind at all because we stayed at my parents which suited me just fine especially considering what I'd gone through while spending the weekend with Smiley's folks the weekend before. That's was when the real truth about Mr. Macho Hubby came to light.

Hubby and I had just retired for the night and were laying in bed talking when we heard a sort of scratching noise in the wall above our heads. When I asked Hubby what he thought the noise was he said it was probably a mouse with PROBABLY being the operative word. Since there was a three inch hole in the wall near where the scratching noise was coming from and I was curious I decided to hit the wall and see if the mouse would pop out. I wasn't the least bit afraid of mice. Well I hit that ole wall alright and sure enough out popped the mouse, the only problem was that the mouse had no perky little ears and no cute little nose, just one heck of a long tail, SNAKE!!!, I kid you not. Boy talk about a Kodak moment. Mr. Macho came outta that bed like he'd been shot from a cannon. He tore the bedroom door clean of its hinges gettin outta there. I

was approximately 10/100ths of a second behind him. If I'd waited around for Hubby to protect me I'd have been gettin an old age pension. Typical male eh? They always have to be first. I'll bet he broke the world record for the fifty yard dash. They say chivalry is dead, well I know exactly when it died and who killed it, dear ole Hubby the night the snake came out of the wall. Needless to say we packed up right there and then and headed back to Marten River. There endth yet another exciting weekend with Smiley's parents. There was just no end to the excitement at that place, heh heh.

When Hubby got the job in Marten River he finally got another car. My car was a 57 Chevy hardtop. Well it was Smiley who bought it but Smiley was my husband so it was mine. The car didn't have a grill in the front so we put the signal lights on the hood in place of two chrome do-hickeys that were supposed to be there. Alright so the car wasn't in show room condition but it did have a kind of customized look. It was at this point in time I learned that if anything was going to go wrong with the car it would only happen when I was driving, like the horn falling off while I was boogeying up the highway at 110 miles per. Ever notice how when something does go wrong with your vehicle while your driving Hubby's first words are always, "What did you do to it?", or even if something goes wrong while Hubby's driving his first words are, "What did you do to it?". Yup, Hubby will want to know what you did to it when you were driving to make something go wrong while he's driving it, yeah right. "Oh Sweetums, I blew the motor in you putt putt while driving down the highway because a. I was bored b. I was ticked off at you about something or c. both of the above", or you could try, "I just wanted to see if I could do it and I could. Oh Honey, I'm not sure just how I did it, would you mind explaining it to me so I'll know for next time?". Get real Hubby, show me in our marriage vows where it says I have to take the blame for any or all mechanical failures connected with the family transportation system.

Now I'm not saying Hubby was totally without reason for his accusations. There was that one time when Hubby actually let me drive with him in the car. I was going up Haycocks Hill in Huntsville which was so steep and windy that hardly anyone used it during the winter months because they couldn't get their vehicle up it without getting stuck. Anyway it was summertime and I started up Haycocks Hill with the pedal to the metal and goin like a bat outta hell. About halfway up I grabbed the gear shift lever for the automatic transmission and slammed the car into what I thought was low gear, uh uh, it was reverse. I must of really hurt the car cause boy did it scream. Hubby screamed too, at me. It wasn't like I'd done it on purpose or anything, SHEESH, was he cranky. Hubby ranted on for weeks about my little miscalculation, however he did get over it, eventually.

With having my own car also came the realization that there was more to owning a car besides just driving it. I pulled into a gas station to fill er up one day and when I tried to stop at the gas pump the car kept right on goin. When I finally got stopped, (I pulled on the emergency brake, handy little things those), I asked the station attendant to check the brake fluid. The attendant looked under the hood and asked, "What brake fluid lady?". Smart ass, how was I supposed to know to check for brake fluid? I thought that was what Hubby was for. Another time I asked the attendant to check the oil. He looked under the hood and asked, uh huh you got it, "What oil lady?". Well at least I remembered to get it checked, that ought to count for something, shouldn't it? Believe it or not one time I actually tried working as a gas station attendant. At the end of my first day on the job I had eight gas caps left over. It was my first and last day. Like I said, Hubby did have some cause for consternation but not a whole lot, heh heh.

When we first moved to Marten River I almost went stir crazy. Hubby worked ten hours a

day and even when he wasn't working he spent a lot of time with the guys up at the bunkhouse. I wasn't used to being alone not that I wasn't good company you understand but I was a people person. The little shack we occupied sure didn't do much for my state of mind either. It seemed the previous occupants had children, sons to be exact and as with most boys they were into creepy, crawly things, namely snakes. What else eh and it could only happen to who else eh? It seemed I couldn't step outside the door of the shack without running into one or two of the slithering serpents. It got so bad I was literally afraid to go outside and that's where the bathroom was, naturally. The only time I'd go outside to the bathroom was when Hubby was there to run interference. The rest of the time I relied on my strong bladder and a bucket under the bed.

Hubby couldn't or wouldn't understand my problem, heck he wouldn't even admit there was one. It was the same as a couple of years later, Hubby wouldn't believe there was a problem then either. I'd gotten out of bed one morning with really awesome chest pains. Hubby said it was just gas and to take an antacid. Yeah right, I pleaded with him to drive me to the hospital but Dr, Hubby was adamant, it was gas. Finally I took matters into my own hands, literally. I drove myself the forty-four miles to the hospital. It turned out that Dr. Hubby was a quack, surprise surprise eh, my so-called gas pains turned out to be a collapsed lung. Imagination that, Hubby had been wrong yet again. You know some people do learn from there mistakes and then again there was good ole Hubby. Anyway, back to the you-know-what problem, yep that was the one, SNAKES.

When it got so I could hardly breathe anymore Hubby finally relented and took me to see a doctor. It's hard to believe what happened even now. The doctor was very kind and understanding, he talked to me for over an hour. He told me there was nothing physically wrong with me, he said my problem was nerves. The doctor felt my fear of snakes plus the fact I had to spend so much time alone which in turn gave me lots of time to work myself into a real state over the pesky little critters was the cause of my health problems. The doctor then called Hubby in from the waiting room and explained the problem. He told Hubby if my lifestyle didn't change immediately I'd end up in a mental hospital within two weeks. Hubby seemed to accept what the doctor told him and assured him he'd do whatever was necessary to help me. I was ecstatic. I was gonna get out of my snake-imposed prison. My euphoria lasted until Hubby and I got out of the doctor's office. Then good ole Hubby asked me how long I'd been having an affair with the doctor. Can you believe it? How was that for compassion and understanding? Where in hell Hubby came up with that one I'll never know. I guess the fact he only had two parts to his brain and one was lost and the other was out looking for it could explain his reaction. About then my basic survival instinct kicked into high gear and I let Hubby have it with both barrels. Hubby was speechless, he'd never seen me when I'm in the midst of a full blown rage and I'll bet he hoped he'd never have to see it again. Suffice it to say Hubby saw the light and my lifestyle did indeed change immediately. Hubby and I moved to a ten by forty house trailer with inside conveniences just around the corner from where the cabin crawlin with snakes was and I got a job at the local post office cum restaurant, gift shop, motel and service station. To go with our new lifestyle Hubby got us a new car, well new to us.

My new car, oh alright, Hubby's, was an old 1963 Dodge. It had 133,000 miles on the odometer and it ran beautifully in spite of me. The body was falling apart though, (Not mine, the cars), so you couldn't put anything or anybody in the back seat or it or they would have gone clean thru the floorboards. One morning I discovered a flat tire, no not on me, on the car, mine's called a spare tire. Since I didn't think Hubby had noticed the tire when he'd left for work earlier

I decided to try and change it myself. I love a challenge, even the fact it was pouring rain at the time didn't deter me. I'd seen it done countless times and it hadn't looked too hard, uh huh.

I threw a jacket on over my shortie nightie and went out to do my thing. I used a screwdriver to pry off the hubcap (excuse me, wheelcover) and then I got the tire thingy out of the trunk, you know, the doey you take the nuts off with. Then I remembered you had to jack the car up to get the tire off. Unbelievably I did it. I jacked the car up with hardly any problems at all. It was mostly more good luck than good management but what the hey, I did it and thats what mattered. I then figured out which doey fit the nut and before you ask, no I'm not one of those people who tries to put a square peg in a round hole. I put the doey over the nut and pushed, nothing happened. I pushed, I shoved, I practically stood on my head and I cursed trying to get those darn nuts off and nothing. Not a one of them budged even a little. Well necessity is the mother of invention so I decided to try putting some oil on the nuts. I figured the oil would loosen the nuts and make them easier to turn, uh huh. I got Hubby's mineral oil, the stuff he drank every night to stay regular and poured it over each nut. I thought, "Now I'll get somewhere", I surely did, face first in the mud. The mineral oil made them nuts slipperier than a greased pig in a pail of lard. Just then dear ole Hubby showed up to change the tire, he had noticed it when he left for work. Would you believe Hubby had the audacity to laugh at what he termed as my pathetic attempt to change the tire? How the hell was I supposed to know I'd been trying to turn the nuts in the wrong direction? They say experience is the best teacher, well they're right on the money with that one. I'll never go through that experience again and money is what I told Hubby it was gonna cost him the next time I had a flat tire as I would call a garage to fix it and have the bill sent to him. There's a lot to be said for standing on the side of the road and looking helpless when somebody comes along and offers to change a tire for you. You know some days it just don't pay to get out of bed and that was definitely one of em.

Finally and with no help from me I might add, the old Dodge gave up the ghost. Oh the motor still ran like a charm but the body went kaput with a little help from good ole Hubby, a bottle of Jack Daniel's best and a rock cut on the north highway. Next we got a pair of half ton trucks. yep two. One for me and one for the drunk, disgusting dipstick formerly known as Hubby. Hubby's truck was a G.M.C. with a fleetside box. Don't let the word fleet throw you, the darn thing wouldn't go half the time let alone go fast. My truck was one heavy little Chevy. It was the prettiest colour purple which I had chosen which Hubby thought was stupid. It had white west coast mirrors and the peppiest little V-6 motor goin and go it did. I was quite happy with my hot little Chevy but not dear ole Hubby, oh no, he'd obviously never heard the expression, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". First off he decided I needed a V-8 motor, yeah right, like I didn't have enough speeding tickets already, just kidding, I should say the tickets I should have gotten iffin Johnny Law had ever caught up with me. Before I could say, " no way Jose", Hubby had a chain hoist rigged up and my peppy little V-6 motor was up and out. Then good ole Hubby, shade tree mechanic extrodinaire, put in a V-8 motor, well sort of. I said sort off because the linkage between the new motor and the transmission didn't fit just right and two gear shifts sprouted up outta the floor in the cab of MY truck. One gearshift was for first and reverse gears and the other one was for second and third gears. No damn wonder Hubby and I weren't compatible, he was the one trying to put the square peg in the round hole, heh heh. As well something happened to the ignition and I now had to use a tablespoon to start MY truck. Real impressed I was. Boy I was cooking now, I was boiling, boiling mad that is. Do you have any idea just how embarrassing it was to have to start a vehicle with a tablespoon while some yahoo of a gas jockey

is standing there snickering? Oh yes, my gas gauge didn't work anymore either. I found that little fact out when I ran out of gas twenty-five miles out in the boonies when the temperature was thirty-two degrees fahrenheit below zero. I guess what really put the icing in the cake was when the drive shaft kept falling out. Anytime, anywhere, there I'd be sitting on the side of the road waiting for good ole Hubby to come and fix My truck. Through all the trials and tribulations with My truck, Hubby never had any trouble with HIS truck. Amazing ain't it. What goes around comes around and I prayed that if there was a God he would let me play a part in making that happen for good ole Hubby. Well, THERE WAS A GOD but you'll find out all about it in the next chapter.

Things went along smoothly for awhile and Hubby and I even had some good times, hard to believe eh? Oh Hubby didn't stop drinking, heavens no, but he was easier to get along with or else I was just getting used to him. We even started doing things together like ski-dooing in the winter months. It was a riot and my folks had re-located to the area so it made things even better. We'd spend all our free time out ski-dooing in the great outdoors. Hubby always drove and I rode a sleigh behind. The sleigh was one of those where you straddled the seat and your feet rested on the skis. Riding that sleigh was just like square dancing. You'd be dippin for the oyster, divin for the pearl, doosey dooin and allemandin left, right and everything in between. Of course you had to be careful you didn't fall off, the main reason being not because you'd get hurt although that could and did happen but because it was usually one heck of a long walk home. Good ole Hubby never seemed to notice when I'd fall off and he'd just keep motorin. Uh huh, it happened too many times to be coincidental no matter what Hubby said. One time when I fell off I sorta sidled up against a tree, it was one hell of a long walk home with my cracked ribs I tell you.

Maybe Hubby was trying to pay me back over the bush buggy incident. I don't know how he could have blamed me after all he was the one driving. You see we led a pretty motorized life. In winter we ski-dooed and in summer we bush-buggied. You wouldn't believe how little time it took to turn a Volkswagen beetle bug into a bush buggy. Hubby and his buddies had turned it into a fine art. I don't know where they found all the V W's to practice on and I was too much of a coward to check the stolen vehicle list at the cop shop, you know, guilty by association and all that. One time an insurance agent came to see us, he was driving a V.W. He didn't stick around long especially after I told him what would happen to his beloved beetle iffin he left it parked any longer than ten minutes in the driveway. As soon as the guys got hold of a suitable candidate they'd start converting it. It didn't matter if it was during working hours, heck no, one of the guys would just throw a monkey wrench into the works to cause a mechanical failure at the mill and they'd be off making a bush buggy while the millwright up at the mill was trying to figure out why the heck mill wouldn't run.

Anyway, this one time Hubby and I were checking out his latest convert going up and down sand hills in the gravel pit. Hubby thought he was such a good wheel man, heh heh. We got up almost to the top of a really steep hill when the steering wheel jerked out of Hubby's hands with a hard pull to the right and Hubby fell out. Now Hubby didn't get hurt when he fell out and he didn't even get hurt when the bush buggy he was supposed to be driving ran over him coasting back down the hill, no, the only thing hurtin Hubby was his pride. I was laughing so hard there were tears streaming down my cheeks. He could have been seriously hurt for all I knew but it was sooo funny I just couldn't help myself. I mean Hubby (Mr. Macho) falling out while driving was hilarious but the bush buggy actually having the audacity to then run him over was

hysterical. I swear Hubby thought the bush buggy pushed him out and ran over him on purpose. Get real eh Hubby, we're talking an inanimate object here. Hubby wasn't impressed with my reaction but hey he wasn't impressed weeks later when I was still reminding him to, " Hang in there Hubby ", heh heh. Hey, I took my perks where I could find them.

One morning while sitting at the kitchen table after Hubby had left for work I was looking out the window and I saw this cute little critter running in and out of the garbage bag that was by the front door. It was sooo darling. It was all white with a little black tip on the end of it's tail. The next time it went into the garbage bag I very quietly got into position and when it started back out of the bag I grabbed it. I was so excited, I didn't know what it was but I'd caught it and I was determined to give it a good home whether it wanted one or not. My only problem or so I thought was my siamese cat, Doodies. I was afraid Doodies might attack it or something and hurt it so I locked it in the bathroom out of harms way and waited patiently for Hubby to come home for lunch so I could show him what I had. Well Hubby's truck finally pulled in the driveway, I greeted him at the door and started pulling him towards the bathroom babblin on and on about my new pet. When I started describing it to Hubby he stopped dead in his tracks with an incredulous look on his face. For a brief second or two I thought Hubby was impressed with what I was describing, WRONG! Actually Hubby was stunned by my audacity. It seems not everyone can catch a weasel, yes I said weasel, with their bare hands and play with it without suffering some painful consequences, I CAN! Hubby continued to explain to me just how vicious a critter like my weasel could be. Oh wow, here I'd been worried about my cat harming the poor little thing and it could have made filet of feline out of Doodies without any effort at all. By the time Hubby finished sprouting off I realized just how dangerous a weasel was, he got his point across so well I refused to go into the bathroom and remove said weasel. Poor Hubby, he donned his brand new ski-doo mitts and gingerly entered the bathroom. Boy you should have seen that sucker move, the weasel I mean, not Hubby. After a lot of dippin, divin, and dosey-doeing Hubby finally caught up with you know who which I hadn't known what. I couldn't believe the mood swing of that weasel. When I'd brought him into the house he'd been a docile, lovable little critter, when Hubby took him out he was squawking like a wounded whatever, the weasel I mean, not Hubby and by the time he got him out the door his new ski-doo mitts were in shreds, Hubby's not the weasel's. The end result was I had to promise Hubby I wouldn't bring another pet into the house unless I knew what it was. Notice he didn't specify what kind of critter I could bring home, he just said I had to know what it was. Some people just never learn.

During the time we lived in Marten River Hubby learned to use facial muscle he never knew he had. Some of the expressions he came up with I've never seen duplicated. Like the one he had the day he came home and found me feeding a bull moose out back of our trailer. The look on his face was unique to say the least, I'd never seen a face contorted in just that way before, another Kodak moment. Well at least I knew what the critter was. Too bad I couldn't coax it into the trailer but I guess a full grown moose wouldn't exactly been comfortable in a ten by forty foot house trailer. Since Hubby kept gettin all bent outta shape over my critters I decided that what he didn't know would belay any more hassles. It wasn't one of my better ideas. I did manage to keep my two baby bunnies, Cotton and Candy under wraps for a few days but then Hubby realized it wasn't raisins on the floor that he kept stepping in, besides even I wasn't that bad a housekeeper.

I will admit that on rare occasions Hubby was tolerant about my critters. Chippy the chipmunk I'd trained to climb all over me looking for peanuts in my pockets was one such

example. Chippy would come right into the trailer, climb into my pockets and look for peanuts. He wouldn't leave until he had his quota, one in each cheek pouch and one hanging out of his mouth. Oh yes, if Chippy didn't find three peanuts he'd bite you. I'm sorry to say, heh heh, I forgot to inform Hubby of that little fact but it really didn't matter because Hubby found out for himself, the hard way. At least Hubby was making an effort and I was grateful although not grateful enough it seems because when Hubby found out about the mice he went through the roof.

One day when I went to light the gas oven I found a mouse in it. This wasn't just any mouse, this was a mommy mouse. I knew that because she had taken insulation out of the oven door to build a nest in one corner of the oven and was in the process of giving birth. I just couldn't disturb her and I couldn't tell Hubby because he'd throw his usual hissy fit. You wouldn't believe what I went through so I didn't have to use that darn oven or cause dear ole Hubby to get suspicious. It's a good job we lived at the edge of a gravel pit or else I'd probably been responsible for the destruction of thousands of acres of forest land. Take it from me, trying to cook a roast of pork in a bed of coals ain't easy and especially if you don't know the first thing about building the bed of coals in the first place and have never cooked outdoors in the second place. After about three nights of char-burnt offerings Hubby got suspicious. He didn't buy my explanation about how much fun it was trying to learn how it had been for early woman, real early woman. When Hubby found out he'd been gagging on his supper three nights running because of a family of mice he was to put it mildly, livid. Another Kodak moment. I should really have invested in a camera. Hubby said the mice had to go. Uh huh, I told Hubby, "If the mice go, I go". Boy was I pushing my luck. After much begging, shouting and sulking on Hubby's part I got him to see things MY way and he agreed to let mommy mouse stay put but only until her babies left the nest. Oh yeah, I had to agree to pay for supper at the local truck stop every night until the oven was vacated. Everybody was happy, Hubby got decent dinners, mommy mouse got to raise her babies in a safe secure place and I got a nice warm feeling from doing my bit but I may have been wrong about Hubby being happy. I'm sure what happened after the mouse incident was done on purpose by Hubby as a sort of payback but he always swore it wasn't.

You see Hubby was an avid fisherman. He loved to fish next to drink that is. Hubby particularly liked fishing in Marten River for pike which were good eating, huh, to me they looked like fat snakes with fins. Anyway quite often when ice-fishing during the winter months Hubby's catch of the day would be frozen by the time he got home so he would put it in the kitchen sink to thaw so he could filet it. One day when I got home from work I went hurrying in to the bathroom because it had been cold coming home and everytime I get cold I have to go 10-100. For those not in the know, 10-100 is C.B. lingo and means Mother Nature is calling. Hubby wasn't into C.B. radios but I was. When you live miles away from civilization way out in the boonies and you've got a Hubby like mine doing all the mechanical work on your vehicle and you spend a lot of time driving on an almost deserted highway all by yourself then anything that gives any semblance of being a lifeline gives you a much needed sense of security. Cellular phones were non-existent back then. By the way, my C.B. handle or name was Lonesome Rebel, I thought it suited me very well, don't you? Anyway, I was in such a hurry to sit on the throne when I got into the bathroom I didn't notice the shower curtain was drawn across the tub. So there I was having a peaceful and Whew, almost wet my woollies piddle when all of a sudden the shower curtain started moving and it sounded like someone was having some sort of seizure in

the tub behind the curtain. My heartbeat stopped dead then took off beating faster than a drummer drumming WIPEOUT with one drumstick. Boy talk about getting caught with your pants down. Just then part of the curtain opened and what I saw made me forget all about dignity and personal hygiene. I got the hell outta there as fast as I could go which wasn't all that fast as my pants were still at half-mast.

Meanwhile Hubby was sitting in the living room nonchalantly watching television. Uh huh, I saw him smirking when he thought I wasn't looking. The monster in the bathtub turned out to be Hubby's catch of his entire fishing career. It was a three foot northern pike that weighed in around the thirteen pound mark. Lord that fish was huge and ugly, exceedingly ugly. Hubby explained he'd put the fish in the bathtub to thaw out because it wouldn't fit in the kitchen sink. Just as a matter of interest, do you know that once a northern pike freezes and then thaws out that it's still alive and thrashes around? Scary ain't it. A native friend of Hubby's gave us a demonstration one day on just how hard it was to kill a northern pike. He took a pike Hubby had just caught, filleted it in record time and put it back in the lake minus the filets of course. The fish swam away!! Hubby was real impressed, I wasn't and I'll bet the pike wasn't either. Now that's enough to give a person nightmares and the cruelty to the poor fish was unconchinable. Of course he was a friend of Hubbys, need I say more? Anyway, Hubby said he'd tried to tell me about the fish in the bathtub when I'd come in from work but I'd been in such a hurry to get to the bathroom I hadn't heard him. Yeah right, believe me, THAT I would have heard. Hubby had his moment that time but I sure didn't like it. However, as I said before, what goes around comes around and Hubby's what was still to come.

Good ole Hubby got the bright idea to get a license to set minnow traps to trap minnows and sell them to the local tourists camps to make some extra money. Guess who got to handle the entire operation, who else eh? The only time Hubby did anything was when his buddies would come down from the mill where Hubby worked to stand around and shoot the bull. Then Hubby would act like a big- shot and brag about how busy he was with the minnow business and moan about all the extra work HE had to do. Uh huh, Hubby sure knew how to shoot the bull. Hubby already had an inflated opinion of himself because he was the sawyer at the mill and made more money than the rest of the guys. Hubby was all taken up with his image, the one he mistakenly thought he had where all the guys looked up to him as their leader. Anyway this one night there were about ten or twelve guys from the mill standing out in the yard with Hubby near the minnow tanks listening to Hubby spewing a lot of hot air when our dog, Smokey, came running down the driveway with a live, squirmin snake hanging out of his mouth. I was watching out the window and if I'd been writing the scene myself I couldn't have done any better. Smokey headed straight for Hubby. When Hubby saw Smokey coming and realized what he had in his mouth you could just see the fear and indecision written on his face. Hubby didn't have a whole lot of choices. He could stay where he was and hoped the dog dropped dead before he got close to him therefore allowing him to keep his image intact in front of the guys or he could make a mad dash for the safety of the trailer and blow the image he thought he had right in front of the guys.

Sheer terror won out as Hubby waited until the last possible second and then ran like a bat outta hell for the trailer. So much for standing ones ground, heh heh. Hubby beat Smokey to the door by mere milliseconds. Ain't it amazing what a little motivation can do? Anyway, Hubby wouldn't go back out to talk to the guys, he made me go out and give them so lame excuse about not feeling very well, uh huh, the guys weren't stupid. The next day at work Hubby took a little bit of ribbing over his mad dash but for the most part the guys were pretty easy on him. The fact

Hubby wasn't exactly a midget may have had a lot to do with it. Would you make fun of a guy who weighs upwards of three hundred pounds and has a mean temper? I thought not. The whole episode took Hubby down a peg or two which in my highly valued opinion was long overdue and for awhile he was a lot easier to live with, well there was one little thing Hubby seemed to take exception to. Things were kind of slow at the mill so Hubby worked in the bush occasionally hooking chokers whatever that meant and for some reason I just couldn't keep it straight in my mind. Whenever anyone asked me what Hubby was doing I'd tell them he was choking hookers. Boy did Hubby get ticked off. He'd keep yellin at me, "It's hooking chokers, it's hooking chokers". Oh well, nobody's perfect, heh heh.

I'd always wondered what the big hullabaloo was about hunting especially with my love of critters. While living in Marten River which was smack dab in some of the best hunting country in the province my curiosity got the better of me. I couldn't understand what sort of thrill a person got from killing a poor defenseless animal. It seemed so unfair but I decided to give it a whirl and see what was what before I confirmed my opinion that hunting was unfair, cruel and just plain stupid. Now hunting if I understood correctly is considered to be the capital S of sport, HA! A person walks into the bush armed with a rifle, sees an animal, raises his gun and shoots it dead. That's a sport? Funny I always associated a sport as a bunch of jocks running around chasing some type or other of a ball on a big patch of grass, but heck, I was just a female what the hell did I know? Nothing, hence my foray into the hunting hoopla.

In early times, I'm talkin Grunt the caveman early times, man walked softly and carried a big stick. He'd sneak up on the dinosaur of his choice and whack it right along side of the head. More often than not, Grunt would end up as Dino's dinner entree instead of the other way around but that was the early times for you. It was man against beast and the score was, Man-0, Beast-1.

As time moved on Grunt's descendants, Human de Jour, Man-a-la- Mode and Person in Swamp Sauce discovered they could fashion little do-dads from wood and stone and use these amazing discoveries in the battle against the beasts. The score, not surprisingly was, Man-0, Beasts-1. Obviously man's amazing discovery wasn't amazing enough. It was back to ye ole drawing board.

Before you could say "UGH" man discovered a sort of circular thingy that would move in a rolling motion if you gave it a bit of a nudge. It was versatile too, you could nudge it with your foot, your hand and even your head if you were really daring. Mind you this new discovery wasn't very good for battling the beasties but you could beat one hell of a hasty retreat with it. Well it was back to the ole you-know-what and the score was, you got it, Man-0, Beasts-1.

Eventually as man evolved he made more and more discoveries. Some of these discoveries weren't all that amazing but then again some were. One such amazing discovery was a black, sand-like substance and it was incredibly versatile and just a tad dangerous. Why you could use it to light up the night sky with a kaleidoscope of colour, you could blow big, gaping holes in just about anything with it and believe it or not you could pour some of the stuff down a piece of steel tube with a fancy shaped hunk of wood attached to the end of it, pull on a little hunk of metal attached to the underside of the wood with your finger and presto, you'd get a real bang out of it. GUNPOWDER, awesome stuff that. Of course with all man's great discoveries there were a few bugs to be worked out. Quite often when man pointed his little wood and metal contraption and pulled the metal thingy with his finger it would blow up in his face. Oh darn, back to ye ole you-know-what.

Now by this time Dino and his kin were long gone off the face of the earth. The reason for

this some people attribute to the ice age or whatever. I reckon the real reason was man. I figure Dino and his buddies got such a hoot out of mans ineptness with his amazing discoveries that their laughing caused an earthquake measuring around seven point something on the Richter Scale which in turn caused a huge chasm to open up along the San Andreas Fault Line and the dinosaurs just fell in and went belly-up. My theory isn't very probable but it could have happened that way. It's just as probable as the entire world being covered in ice. How would the entire world get covered in ice anyway? Did one of the dinosaurs forget to shut the door on his freezer? Yeah right, I guess we'll never know. It was a whole new ball game and the score was, Man-0, Gunpowder-1.

Well if nothing else man was persistent and eventually he cottoned on to the whereises and whyfores of gunpowder. This caused a dramatic change in the way of things. Man could now hide behind trees, under overhangs of rock or in the holes he blew in the landscape when he was first foolin around with gunpowder, wait for some poor, unsuspecting critter to come moseying along and blow it to smithereens. The score, Man-1, Beast-0. Man may have considered this sport but I'll bet no-one asked the critters for their opinion.

As I said earlier I'd decided to give hunting a shot, literally. Now to start with you just don't go out, buy a gun, head for the hills and start slappin leather. Heck no, theys got laws. First off you have to attend what's called a hunter's safety course sponsored by your local Ministry of Natural Resources. During this little sojourn, Ranger Ralph teaches you what to do and even more importantly what not to do with your firearm. I'm not real good at telling jokes but this one is so appropriate I can't help myself so grin and bear it.

It seems there was this auto mechanic who was using gasoline to wash some greasy engine parts, (he obviously never heard of Madge or Palmolive), anyway he spilled some gas on his arm and it was really stinging him so he decided to go the emergency room at the local hospital and have it looked at. He got into his car and off he went. While enroute he forgot himself and lit a cigarette, POOF!!, his arm burst into flames. He may not have been too bright but he was resourceful, he rolled down the car window, stuck his burning arm out and speeded up figuring the wind would put out the flames. When a police officer driving in the opposite direction saw what was goin on he pulled a u-turn and when he caught up with the mechanic he pulled him over. He jumped out of his cruiser with a fire extinguisher in hand and ran over to the mechanic and extinguished the flames. Then the officer proceeded to arrest the mechanic. Do you know what he arrested him for, pointing a firearm. Heh heh, that's one of my favorites.

One of the safety rules for handling a firearm is never shoot at anything unless you know what it is. I guess that meant if you were standing out in the middle of nowhere and some sort of kitty charged out at you and you weren't sure if it was a cougar or a mountain lion you were gonna be up the proverbial creek without a paddle. If you shot at it then you'd be breaking one of Ranger Ralph's foremost commandments and the kitty wouldn't be real impressed either but if you didn't shoot at it, it would be game over and the score would be, Kitty-1, You-0. It would be the ole damned if you do and damned if you don't quandary.

It was about then that I figured there was a tad more to this hunting bit than I'd first thought. Anyway it made me pay a little closer attention to Ranger Ralph's teachings which was just as well because Ranger Ralph would be asking questions later on in the form of a written test followed by a practical test. I figured, "no sweat" but in my figuring I forgot to tie in a certain factor, Murphy's Law.

The night of the big test arrived and my Mom and another dude, Crash Kumkwat, (you

remember him don't you, the twit who couldn't keep his first car right side up?) well anyway they had taken the course with me and we all took off together to take the test and strut our stuff for Ranger Ralph at a site twenty-six miles up the highway. As everyone knows, Murphy's Law states quite plainly, "If anything can go wrong, it will", and it did. Good ole Hubby who was descended from a long line of baling wire and black tape mechanics and was our resident mechanic and sure enough the baling wire broke and the tape came unstuck and as usual Hubby wasn't around to patch it up. By the time we got the ole bucket of bolts running again we'd missed the whole bloody shootin match. Oh darn, but it was Ranger Ralph to the rescue. He said he would come to my Mom's house the first chance he had and let us take the test there. Boy was he brave, foolish but brave.

A few nights later, Ranger Ralph true to his word knocked on my door. He informed me he was real short on time and if I wanted to take the test for my gun license I'd better follow him up to my Mom's house A.S.A.P. Now having a healthy respect for authority, heh heh, I followed Ranger Ralph up the highway to my Mom's house. As I was getting out of my truck I realized my attire wasn't quite appropriate for taking a gun license test. A floor length, blue flowered, flannel nightgown topped by an equally long, billowing lounging robe in shades of pastel blue wasn't what the well dressed hunter dons to go a-huntin. However I was wearing appropriate head and foot attire. I was wearing a dark, brown, leather, floppy brimmed hat with fluorescent orangey ribbons placed strategically around its perimeter and on my feet I wore a pair of tan coloured leather battle booties more commonly known at the time as snoot boots. They were guaranteed not to grow fungus or rot. Eat your heart out Annie Oakley. I'd have been wearing fur-lined underwear as well except the only fur around was being worn by Misters Beaver, Mink and Raccoon respectively. The only way they'd have given it up was iffin I'd rasselled em for it. I couldn't do it the sportsmans way and just shoot em for it, you had to have a gun license to do that. The score, Beasts-1, Me-0.

Did I tell you that besides the written test Ranger Ralph also had to check us out in a practical test to see how well we handled our firearms while frolicking through the forest? Yeah, I thought I did. The written exam was a cinch, it was during the practical part that Murphy's Law ran rampant. Trampin through the bush tottin a twenty gauge shotgun shouldn't be much of a problem but trampin through the bush tottin a twenty gauge shotgun in one hand and holdin up yards of billowing material in the other hand definitely is. I kept getting caught up in little branches. Boy talk about reaching out to touch someone, those branches mobbed me. I swear those branches were doing it on purpose. All in all I figured I was doing pretty well considering, then came the Piece de Resistance, ye ole barbed wire fence, oh darn.

Ranger Ralph's instructions on getting over a fence were quite simple. Walk up to said fence, unload your firearm, place it on the other side of the aforementioned fence and then climb on over. Obviously Ranger Ralph had never climbed over a fence of any kind with six yards of lounging robe swirling about his feet. Let's just say that thankfully I was graded on how well I put my gun across and not my person. I'll bet there is still two and a quarter yards of pastel blue fabric hangin on that fence and I never did recover all my pride. I've heard it said, "Pride goes before a fall", it does. Thanks to the powers that be I'd had the good sense to change into my snoot boots before I left home, there is no way in hell my long-eared bunny slippers would have come through the ordeal unscathed. Ranger Ralph was very business-like throughout, how he kept a straight face is beyond me, no-one else did. The three of us did receive the coveted gun license and I as well got the dubious distinction of being the only person, male or female, in the

entire country of Canada to try for and get my gun license dressed in my nightie. Impressive eh?

Next morning I was out the door at the crack of dawn. I was finally going to find out what the big deal about hunting was. During the morning I came across all sorts of critters, Bullwinkle Moose feeding at the marsh, Bambi drinking from the pond, Thumper hopping across an open field and Bucky Beaver building his dam. So enthralled was I with those beautiful creatures in their natural habitat that not once did it cross my mind that I could shoot at them even though I had my shotgun slung over my shoulder. The score was still, Beasts-1, Me-0.

I went out hunting again a few times more but I never shot at anything except an occasional tin can which I didn't even have a recipe for, besides which it was easier to hit than a moving target. Don't sell me short here, I was and am a pretty fair markswoman, I could give Annie Oakley a real run for her money. Another reason I only shot a tin cans was an ole tin can doesn't look at you with a sorrowful expression. I'd like to say I never shot and killed anything and if I had continued going out alone to hunt I probably could have but I didn't and I did. I went out a couple of times with my Mom and shot a few partridge and then I went out hunting with my Dad and that's when I gained real insight into the hunting hullabaloo. There were actually four of us out hunting that day. Dad, Mom, Ray, a friend of ours and yours truly. When out hunting its different strokes for different folks and boy were my folks different. Mom and Ray liked to just drive around on the bush roads and look for partridge out the window of a car. Dad liked to just park his truck and walk the back roads looking for partridge. Now some people say it don't make no never mind which way you go about it, well those people are full of hooey, yupper, they are. Dad and I walked all day and ended up with fifteen birds. Mom and Ray rode around all day and never even got a shot at a bird which was kind of okay since the daily limit was five birds per person and since Dad and I were over our limit we needed Mom and Ray to even things out. In other words cover our asses in case Ranger Ralph happened along.

I feel I must say something about the common sense of partridge, they don't have any. In nine cases out of ten if you miss a partridge with your first shot it will wait around to see if you do better with your second shot. I'm not kidding. Partridge must be kin to dumb doo doos or something. The score was now tied.

I hate to admit it now but I really enjoyed that day of hunting with my Dad. I got caught up in the excitement and then the excitement almost caught up to me. I said almost, Murphy must have been off sick that day. You see Dad and I hunted together pretty well. When we'd come across some partridge, we'd stand side by side and both shoot. When the birds we didn't hit flew into the bush we'd take turns goin in to flush em out. At one point we were almost back to the truck after walking for about an hour when we spied a whole herd of partridge just a little to the right of the truck, Dad and I both took aim and fired. The birds flew and Dad went into the bush to flush them out, it was his turn. While I was standing there waiting I spied a partridge by the right rear tire of the truck and he was nonchalantly walking along heading for the long grass about a foot away. Boy did I do some rapid mental debate on the pros and cons of the situation. If I shot at the partridge I'd have to be dead on and even then I couldn't be sure that some of the shot wouldn't hit Dad's truck tire. The only thing I was sure of was Dad's reaction if I shot his tire, he'd be madder than a thirty-eight year old virgin who's lost the key to her chastity belt on her wedding night. Well I spent so much time pondering the cons of situation there wasn't any time left for the pros even if I could have thought of any so I did the only thing I could do, I took quick aim and fired. I told you I was excited. I didn't realize I'd been holding my breath till I heard Dad yell, "Did you get it?". I hollered back a very uncertain, "Yeah". At that point I didn't

know if I'd gotten the partridge, the truck tire or both. I walked slowly over to the truck my eyes watching the tire all the while. I kept expecting it to slowly deflate and die. The tire looked okay and a closer inspection confirmed it. WHEW, I'd missed the tire, not the partridge though, his little soul was on it's way to the big bird sanctuary in the sky and his plump little breasts would soon be on their way to my frying pan at home. Breaded partridge breasts dipped in egg, rolled in cracker crumbs and fried in butter sure tasted good.

After my day of hunting with my Dad I didn't go out hunting for quite some time and then I just didn't bother going at all. I'd been there, I'd done that and that was it. I'd given it a try but my heart just wasn't in it, so although I did understand the thrill of the hunt I decided to just stick with getting ole dead chicken from the grocery store. Live and let live works for me.

CHAPTER FOUR: DO UNTO OTHERS

The six years Hubby and I spent in Marten River were never boring. Thanks to me and my critters Hubby never knew what to expect. We kept him at the most a little perplexed and ticked off with a dash of frustration thrown in for good measure and at the very least we kept him somewhat amused. In other words me and my critters were harmless, exasperating at times but harmless. Good ole Hubby never let me get bored either, no siree. With Hubby I never knew what to expect either but the one constant I could count on was whatever it was it would be alcohol related. I would at the most be terrified for my life and at the very least nervous and upset, fearful of what he was gonna do next. Hardly seemed fair did it? I mean even the good times with Hubby weren't all that good but the bad times were just that, BAD, real bad.

During our second year of marriage I had convinced Hubby to leave Marten River and move to Huntsville, temporarily, just for the winter months as the sawmill didn't operate during the really cold weather. I thought it would be great as I would be near all I held dear, my parents, my friends and civilization, uh huh, I should have thought again as it was during our so-called hiatus in Huntsville that I experienced the worst memory of my married life. It was a horrendous nightmare that will stay with me as long as I live.

Hubby's sister, Hefty Two, was getting married. The wedding was scheduled on a Saturday night. I had to work all day as I'd had to take a temporary job as a waitress to make ends meet. Hubby was left to amuse himself which wasn't all that difficult as long as he had his paws wrapped around a bottle. Anyway the plan was for Hubby to pick me up at home after work and we'd then attend his sister's nuptials. When Hubby picked me up he seemed in not too bad of a humour so I was lulled into a false sense of security. When he giggled all the way thru the wedding ceremony I started getting a little nervous as I realized Hubby was more than a little drunk but since he was in a good humour I wasn't overly worried. At the wedding reception which was held in a community centre twenty-five miles from our home, Hubby's good humour prevailed. I was so happy figuring that this was the one time Hubby and I were out together where he wouldn't make a fool of himself, maim anyone or cause me to suffer an acute sense of embarrassment because of his behaviour, uh huh.

I was just sitting by myself on the sidelines watching everyone dancing and having a good time when Hubby appeared out of nowhere. He had a look of drunken rage on his face which scared hell outta me. He asked me in a very tight-lipped way, "Where is it?". I didn't have a clue what IT was so I asked him what he was talking about. I didn't know what had happened to cause his good humour to disappear so suddenly and completely and I was quickly going over the days events in my mind trying to figure out what I might have done to upset things this time. It was always my fault, no matter what, it was always my fault. If there was a flat tire on Hubby's truck it was my fault, I must have driven over a nail while I was using it. If I hadn't been behind the wheel of Hubby's truck in months it didn't matter, it was still my fault. If a bill collector showed up at the door because we were behind in our payments on something it was all my fault. The eighteen hours a day I worked wasn't enough and the fact Hubby blew his paychecks at the local tavern didn't matter, it was all my fault. Like the time Hubby came screeching to a stop in the driveway with his truck, left it running and came hell bent for election into the house to go to the bathroom. The truck which Hubby had left in neutral got tired of waiting and left without him. It took the a tow truck operator 255 feet of cable to haul Hubby's truck up from the spring where it had gone for a drink of water I suppose and of course it was all my fault. If I hadn't made a big pot of beans for supper the night before Hubby wouldn't have gotten the runs and

hence he wouldn't have come lickety split into the house and left his truck idling in the first place. You know back then I wasn't exactly in stupid mode it was more like ignorant mode as I had never been exposed to people who drank in the way that good ole Hubby did and had no experience to handle Hubby's manipulativeness so a lot of the time I actually did believe Hubby when he said things were my fault, after all what did I know? Just to set the record straight, I'm no longer in ignorant mode and haven't been for a long time. Now I KNOW and God help any drunken fool who has the audacity to cross my path and try to tell me something gone wrong in his life is my fault because he'll wake up bouncin if he wakes up at all and that definitely will be my fault.

Anyway back to the reception and Hubby's rage. Hubby just stood there glaring at me and repeating, "Where is it?". I kept asking him what what was but I may as well have saved my breath because I was gonna need it. It was the look in Hubby's eyes, it terrified me. I'd never seen that look in anyone's eyes before and I sincerely hope I never see it again because if you've seen it once and lived to remember it then you've cheated death. Now I don't know about you but I'm definitely not one to push my luck. All of a sudden Hubby just pulled me up outta my chair and presented me a new necklace which was the ugliest thing I'd ever seen. It was made up of Hubby's fat fingers which were still attached to his hands and he insisted on putting it around my neck himself. Once Hubby had the necklace around my neck he wasn't happy about the way it looked so he tightened it up some. Well Hubby must have been some sort of a perfectionist because he just couldn't seem to get the look he wanted for me so he kept pulling the finger necklace tighter and tighter around my throat. I struggled to get free but my attempts were a real lesson in futility. You know how they say fear gives you added strength, well that's a crock. I remember thinking, "Why isn't someone doing anything? Smiley is strangling me in front of all these people and no-one is helping me." Of course I didn't realize that what seemed like minutes to me was in actual fact mere seconds. Air was getting real hard to come by and I felt myself falling and I thought, "This is it, I'm going to die and I don't even know what for".

I found out later when I came to I wasn't alone and I did indeed have help, it took five men to pull Hubby off of me. Once they'd gotten Hubby clear of me he had taken off. A whole bunch of people took me into the kitchen of the reception hall, sat me down and gave me a drink of water. I was scared to death that Hubby would return for an encore. Well showman that he is Hubby reappeared almost immediately. He started yelling, "Where is she?"

I slipped down off of my chair to the floor and crouched on my hands and knees behind the wall of people in front of me praying to God that Hubby wouldn't catch sight of me or hear my sobbing. The people in front of me crowded together to help hide me and then someone told Hubby I had left and gone home. Hubby took the news with his usual aplomb and proceeded to start searching for me. His first stop was the ladies washroom where he smashed all the mirrors, tore the sink off the wall and removed the tank from the back of the toilet. Hubby was into heavy duty head hunting and it was my head he was hunting. I don't know how they did it but some brave soul finally convinced Hubby that I had left the building and Hubby left to go looking for me.

Before Hubby had made his encore appearance I had asked a woman to go and phone my Dad to come and get me and after Hubby's encore performance she came and told me my Dad was on his way. I just wanted out of the nightmare. In the meantime, Hefty's new husband came over to me and told me the reason for the whole ruckus. It seems Hubby had graciously consented to let the newlyweds have the use of our vehicle to go away overnight. Hubby had a

bottle of booze stashed in the car. When it was time for the newlyweds to leave, the bridegroom who knew about the bottle relocated it and then went to tell Hubby where he'd put it. Before the bridegroom could find his new brother-in-law to tell him about moving the bottle Hubby went looking for it and when he discovered it wasn't where he'd left it he figured I had taken it to keep him from drinking anymore. Can you believe it? I almost lost my life and for what, a cheap bottle of booze. I guess trying to take a bottle away from an alcoholic is akin to trying to take a deer carcass away from a pack of wolves, not a good idea and highly hazardous to your health.

When the woman phoned my Dad to come and get me she must have given him a quick run-down on what had transpired because the time it took him to drive the twenty some odd miles to where the reception was taking place was nothing short of miraculous. Boy was I glad to see him. On the way home at a much reduced speed than the drive up Dad told me that at one point while coming to get me he'd seen the flashing lights of a police cruiser behind him so he had switched off the cars lights and slipped down a secondary road to avoid detection. I was pretty proud of my Dad. Of course once Dad got me safely back to his house and we tried to find a cop to report what Hubby had tried to do to me we couldn't find one. What else is new eh?

Mom was waiting for me when I came in the door to reassure me that I was safe and out of Hubby's evil clutches, literally. Everyone was too keyed up to sleep so we sat around the kitchen drinking coffee, just what I needed, caffeine, as if I wasn't hyper enough already. Dad decided to go and look for a police officer to see what could be done about the night's events and I wouldn't let him go until he woke up my brother-in-law to sit up with Mom and I. My twin and her husband were visiting with my parents for the weekend. Dad left to go find a police officer and the time was about 2 a.m. About twenty minutes later the phone rang, it startled me soo bad I threw the cup of coffee I was holding across the room and screamed. Just then Dad came thru the door and he answered the phone. Believe me if a phone rings at two a.m. its a sure bet that its either a drunken fool or bad news. In this case it was both. It was Hubby wanting to know if I was there. I don't remember what all was said between my Dad and Hubby but when Dad hung up the phone he told me Hubby didn't even remember what he'd done. Real smooth that, since Hubby couldn't remember what he'd done I suppose he'd figured I'd forget too, yeah right, and just when exactly was hell gonna freeze over?

The next morning Dad and I were finally able to contact the police. Some help they were. Silly me, I'd always thought the police were there to protect people and preserve law and order, boy was I way off in left field somewhere with that assumption. The police told me I couldn't press charges against my husband without an okay from the local Justice of the Peace. It took almost a week before I could even get in to see the Justice of the Peace. When I did get to see him the Justice of the Peace told me to wait for awhile before I decided whether or not to press charges because nine times out of ten in cases of this nature the wife would back down after laying charges and the time and money spent by the judicial system was wasted. I was so disgusted by the attitude of the police and the Justice of the Peace I told them to just forget the whole thing. It seems the police couldn't lay charges against good ole Hubby themselves unless it was a case of murder or manslaughter, so in other words I had to actually be dead before the police could do anything. So much for ever feeling safe and secure again. I told the Justice of the Peace that I'd tell Hubby to do a better job next time so the police department wouldn't have to waste the taxpayer's money over a trivial thing like my life.

In the meantime Hubby was calling my parents everyday to see how I was doing and

apologizing profusely for what had happened to anyone who would listen. After a while I did agree to talk to Hubby and eventually he managed to convince me his drinking days were over and that he'd never try to harm me again. I was still in ignorant mode and in a moment of sheer stupidity I agreed to take Hubby back. What was even more asinine was the fact that four years later I was still with Hubby who was still wrapping his paws around a bottle every chance he got and had been since about two months after his attempt to do bodily harm to my person. The fact Hubby had his manipulativeness worked down to a fine art is no excuse for what some people called my stupidity in putting up with what I did but I prefer to call it fear or ignorance or both. It was a vicious circle. I was going round and round and the rut I was in got deeper with every rotation. My world revolved around alcohol consumption, Hubby's.

Hubby's drinking not only affected me but the people around us as well. One time Hubby decided to attend a winter carnival being held in the nearest town, twenty-six miles to the north. Well actually it wasn't so much the winter carnival that Hubby wanted to attend as the saloon they were having as part of the carnival. My Mom decided it might be fun to attend the carnival with her son-in- law and to kind of keep an eye on him. As I said before my folks had relocated to Marten River but hadn't found anywhere to live as yet so they were temporarily living in a trailer parked right beside mine and Hubby's. I thought it was a great idea figuring Hubby wouldn't drink too much with his mother-in-law accompanying him, Uh huh. Also attending the carnival with Hubby and Mom were Crash Kumquat and a young friend of ours Donald. Dad and I opted to stay home as a noisy arena-cum-saloon filled with people just sitting around drinking wasn't exactly high on our list of fun things to do.

Anyway, the four of them piled in Hubby's truck and headed for the carnival, they looked so nice, all duded up in their fanciest duds. Dad and I spent a quiet evening pondering one of life's more pertinent problems, what to watch on the ole boob tube. Well I wish you could have seen Yippee, Yappee, Yahooey and ole Kumquat around three a.m. when they came staggerin in. A more sorry lookin bunch I've never seen. They all looked like they'd been sent for and couldn't come, in other words, death warmed over. Apparently everyone of them had intended to just have a few drinks. You know what they say about the road to hell being paved with good intentions, well believe me they all looked like they'd been to hell and back in a Fred Flintsonemobile. Apparently the evening started going awry when an old indian kept trying to talk Mom into going to look at his tom-toms. Well now, that's a novel approach. It sure beats the ole "etchings" bit but not by much. After much ado and much more consumption of evil spirits the four aforementioned decided to head for the local diner to get something to eat before they attempted to drive home. Mom had naturally declined Chief Pain-In-The-You-Know-What's offer to view his tom- toms.

When Yippee, Yappee, Yahooey and 0le Kumquat arrived at the diner they all bailed out of the truck and headed inside. About halfway to the door someone discovered they'd lost Mom. They back- tracked to the truck and sure enough there she was in all her glory, my Mother, she'd tripped over a ski-doo ski and was down on all fours coughin up her cookies, such a lady. It sure did a lot of good sending her to keep her son-in-law in line, she was drunker than he was. Boy talk about being contagious. I'd heard of the blind leading the blind, but now we had the drunkard leading the drunk. Finally everyone got into the restaurant and ole Kumquat pulled out a bottle of hootch and plopped it down right in the centre of the table. That was a tad foolhardy as the somewhat harried owners of the diner had just thrown another group of people out for

doing the exact same thing. Of course ole Kumquat was even drunker than my Mom at this point. So now we had the drunkard leading the drunk who was leading the even drunker, how charming. Now you might wonder what happened to the fourth member of the so- called band of alcoholics, well don't worry, he was still tagging along, although by this time he was in an almost comatose state from the amount of alcohol he'd consumed. So now we had the drunkard leading the drunk who was leading the even drunker who was leading the drunkest. Isn't it nice how they all stuck together? All for one and one for all. Anyway, Mom talked ole Kumquat into hiding the bottle so they wouldn't get kicked out of the restaurant. In the meantime her son-in-law was in the men's washroom mopping up the floor with some guy that had just said "Hi, How yah doin?" as he was passing. Yes siree boy, them's fightin words for sure. Poor guy, can you imagine what would have happened to him if he'd been really rude and said, "Nice night eh?", why good ole Hubby probably would have killed him outright.

Mom sent ole Kumquat into the washroom to retrieve her son-in- law which was a futile effort at best. You never interrupted good ole Hubby when he was doing what he did best which was beating up anybody unfortunate enough to be in the same room. Now Hubby wasn't real particular about who he hit, heck no, he wasn't fussy in the least. Why if there wasn't anybody around to hit he'd just pick on whatever was handy. He particularly liked the sound of mirrors smashing, or the feel of his fist going thru a wall. Why one time he even changed the location of the toilet minus the tank to a site six feet closer to the door. Hubby always was one for saving himself unnecessary steps. When the drunker didn't come back outta the washroom with the drunkard Mom sent the drunkest in to fetch everyone which was even more futile because the drunkest by this time was having a hard time figuring out which end was up. Finally, the even more harried than before owner of the fine dining establishment, heh heh, went into the washroom and proceeded to clean up. Needless to say no-one got anything to eat and the four aforementioned, drunkard, drunk, drunker and drunkest discussed the inhospitability of the diner owner all the way home.

Like I said before, when Yippee, Yappee, Yahooey and ole crash Kumquat got home they looked liked they'd rode in a Fred Flintstonemobile pedaling uphill for all twenty-six miles. They certainly were a sight to behold and one I hoped I'd never have to behold again in my lifetime or anyone else's either for that matter. Now this is where events kind of got out of hand. Mom had been sort of half laying, half sitting on the sofa. Donald, who was about as far gone as a person could get decided he'd better go to bed and his bed happened to be the sofa Mom was on. Dear ole Hubby cheated out of his munchies at the diner was busy raiding the refrigerator and ole crash Kumquat was in the middle of a crying jag. Donald, because he was so far gone, crawled into his bed right on top of my Mom who he didn't even realize was there, Mom let out a holler which must of scared Donald all to hell because he passed out, Hubby was so startled he dropped the big bowl of stewed strawberries he'd just taken out of the fridge and ole crash Kumquat just cried all the harder.

In the meantime, Dad and I just sat at the kitchen table and observed the utter stupidity of the human species while under the influence of alcohol. It was hilarious. Larry, Moe, and Curly would have been proud and maybe even a little envious. Dad and I just kept shaking our heads finding the antics of Yippee, Yappee, Yahooey and ole crash Kumquat so ridiculous as to wonder why anyone in their right mind would ever drink alcohol in the first place. Where were camcorders when I needed them, I could have made a fortune blackmailing the whole sorry bunch.

Anyway, I told Hubby he'd better clean up the spilled berries and he asked me what he should use to clean them up. By this time the situation had lost some of it's humour and I informed Hubby I didn't care what he used but he'd better get it done. The next thing I knew Donald was heading out the door to be violently ill. That caused a little concern as the temperature outside was minus thirty something degrees and poor Donald was clad in only a little pair of bikini underwear. He would have been wearing socks too except Hubby had removed them off Donald's feet while he was passed out and was now using them to wipe up the spilled berries. Donald finally got over being sick and managed to get back inside before he passed out again. Hubby got the berries cleaned up and went to bed, Mom fell asleep and ole crash Kumquat stopped blubbering and went to sleep as well. Whew, it had been some night and not one soon forgotten by Yippee, Yappee, Yahooey and ole crash Kumquat especially the next day when they all seemed to be suffering very ill effects indeed from the night before. It seems they weren't the only ones though, two friends of ours had also attended the winter carnival and gotten tighter than a pair of ticks. During the ride home the one fellow asked the other to stop the truck so he could answer the call of nature. His buddy was happy to comply, so happy in fact from the effects of the alcohol he'd consumed that once he'd stopped and let his buddy out to do his thing he forgot what he'd stopped for and took off continuing his journey home leaving his buddy standing on the side of the highway miles from anywhere. The poor guy did a lot of walking before some kind soul came along and offered him a ride. Yep, the winter carnival, a real good time was had by all, heh heh.

The beginning of the end of my marriage came when I got pregnant with my daughter. Hubby and I had been married for over six years and had never practiced any form of birth control but there was still no sign of a baby. I longed desperately for the patter of little feet although there have been times since the birth of my children that I sometimes wished I'd settled for the patter of little paws instead. Hubby's and my families kept pestering us as to when we were gonna start our own family. Isn't that always the way? You want to know why they do it? Simple, you put your parents through hell while your growing up and now they want you to experience what they did. Yep, you got it, pay back time.

I remember one time I was in the post office getting my mail when Hubby's Uncle Vic came in. When Uncle Vic spotted me standing in line to get my mail he hollered across the crowd at me, "Hey Twiglet, (he always called me twiglet, he said I wasn't big enough to be a Twiggy) are you pregnant yet?" When I signified, "No not yet" by shaking my head he hollered back across the crowd of which by the way he now had their undivided attention, "Well you need a new rooster". A real unread letter day that one, my face was bright red and I left without my mail.

I haunted my doctor for a reason why I wasn't preggie. Finally out of desperation, his and mine, he told me to go home, have intercourse with my Hubby and then stand on my head for fifteen minutes. I kid you not, he actually said that. Talk about feeling ridiculous and what's worse it didn't work. It was a few months later when good ole Hubby and I were at the lowest point in our marriage and Hubby's drinking was at it's highest point and I was finally contemplating getting out while the getting was good that I finally got pregnant. Timing never was my strong suit.

Since Hubby was hitting the bottle so hard I gave him an ultimatum. He either quit drinking completely there and then or I was leaving and I wouldn't be coming back. Hubby hummed and hawed a lot and said he'd try to cut down. I told him that wasn't good enough, he either quit completely or I was outta there. Hubby finally agreed. I also informed him that the first time I

saw him with a drink it was game over. During the entire eight months of my pregnancy, (I always was a little over eager and gave birth a month prematurely) Hubby never touched a drop of alcohol but good ole Hubby did get his revenge over my ultimatum.

During the early months of my pregnancy Hubby got into a squabble over some silly todo with my parents who had since moved forty-four miles away to North Bay and wouldn't allow them anywhere near our home. He also tried to stop me from visiting them as well but he couldn't stop me, after all they were my parents. Mind you there were a lot of times when I wanted to go and see them and couldn't because our transportation would suddenly develop some mechanical bugaboo or at least good ole Hubby said it did. Here I was pregnant for the first time, scared out of my wits because I didn't know the first thing about giving birth and I had no-one to talk to except of course for Hubby. As I said I had no-one to talk to. Things did get a little better when my twin, Darlene and her daughter, Laura, moved in with us after Darlene's marriage broke up but not much. By now Hubby was almost as moody without alcohol as he was with it. Hubby sure wasn't happy about his abstinence and if Hubby wasn't happy he didn't want anyone else happy either.

One time Granny Haslam came to visit overnight with her third husband, you know, he was her first husband as well. Anyway it was the usual disaster. When Granny and Harry came out of the bedroom attired in matching bunny sleepers complete with cotton tails Hubby just cracked up, talk about rude. Of course what else could you expect the woman who told me I'd get syphilis from kissing boys on the lips wear? It had to be either a long flannel nightgown or bunny sleepers and since Granny and Harry wanted matching outfits it had to be bunny sleepers. I guess Harry didn't look too good in a long flannel gown. Between you and me he didn't look real good in bunny sleepers either. I, at least had the grace to try and keep a straight face, I don't know how I managed it but I did. Then Doodies, my siamese cat decided to breed with my sister's cat, Baby, right in front of Granny. Granny's reaction was, "That's absolutely disgusting". Boy was she upset, Granny I mean not Baby. I thought Hubby's remark about cats getting horny too was a tad crass, albeit appropriate.

Granny was a very caring person and was always interested in what her twin granddaughters were up to. I was having a lot of problems with my pregnancy and my doctor had ordered me to quit work and not do anything strenuous for the duration of my pregnancy. Since I'd been trying for over six years to get with child I wasn't about to do anything to put the child I was carrying in jeopardy. Since I couldn't work, Darlene took over my job in my name and no-one could tell the difference as we still looked identical. My bosses knew of course but only because we told them. Granny was quite interested in the whole charade and then when she asked why Darlene wasn't home yet from my job because it was getting quite late, Hubby being Hubby told Granny that Darlene was probably at the local hotel. Hubby knew Granny was dead set against alcohol and it's consumption and just wanted to get her going and amuse himself at Darlene's expense. Well of course this got Granny's underwear in a knot and then Hubby had to really get things going by saying Darlene couldn't drive past the hotel on her way home each night without stopping in. Granny and Harry left the next morning to return home and nothing else was said, due to an oversight which was completely unintentional I might add, somebody forgot to tell Granny that Hubby was just kidding about Darlene drinking. I remember thinking at the time it was a good job Granny hadn't got to see Darlene after what Hubby had told her because Darlene would have been furious at Hubby's little attempt at humour. She didn't drink and had never even been inside the local hotel.

The next night when Darlene came home from work she was so mad she could hardly talk and it wasn't often my twin was at a loss for words. I was quite concerned as to the cause of her anger as it was my job she was doing and I'd always found my bosses to be reasonable people. I finally got Darlene calmed down enough to tell me what the problem was and believe me it was a doozey. Darlene had been working the cash register in the gift shop with her two bosses when this stranger asked her if she was Darlene. She told the man that she was indeed Darlene and asked him what she could do to help him. The man introduced himself and said, "I'm from Alcoholics Anonymous, your Grandmother asked me to come and talk to you".

Now Darlene is one of those people who struts and snorts when she's in a temper and boy was she just a struttin and a-snortin. I tried to keep a straight face, honestly, but the irony of the situation was just too much. Poor Darlene, here she was accused of being a lush when she didn't even drink. To compound matters, her bosses now as well as Granny thought she had an alcohol problem. It was a really hilarious situation in some ways but Darlene didn't seem to think so. Of course when Darlene tried to explain to the fellow from A.A. that a mistake had been made he thought she was just making up an excuse to hide her drinking and didn't believe her. The way I understood it was most people with an alcohol problem deny they have a problem. Talk about a perfect set up. I felt bad about the poor fellow from A.A. having to travel all those miles for nothing although he probably didn't realize it was for nothing. I'm sure he was convinced that Darlene did have an alcohol problem just by the way she denied it. For months I tried to convince Granny that good ole Hubby had only been kidding but you know I don't think she really ever did believe me, not completely. Alcohol abuse is never a joke. I thought it was kind of funny at the time but back then I tried to find humour in everything, it was my way of coping with the harsher realities of my life. And Hubby, well Hubby never did have much of a sense of humour besides which he was just being downright spiteful.

Hubby was also very superstitious and even more so during my pregnancy. To me superstitions are silly. For instance, Hubby's Aunt Mary wrapping the reptile around her neck to get rid of her stiff neck was a really silly superstition. Another for example, a rabbits foot is supposed to bring good luck. All it is, is a stupid superstition and causes extremely bad luck for rabbits.

Early in my pregnancy I had a very unpleasant incident while driving, if it had happened to Hubby he would have never drove that car again. He would have said the car was cursed and what happened was a sign the worst was yet to come. Oh brother, what a dipstick. You see Darlene and I were on our way into town to meet Mom and ole crash Kumquat and attend a game of chance with them. BINGO! That's the one. Anyway as I was driving down the highway a bunny rabbit hippity hopped right in front of my car. Now up until this point I had never run over anything except the occasional ole dead paper shopping bag and I really didn't want to hit the bunny rabbit but there were cars coming towards me so I couldn't swerve out of the way and some yahoo behind me was so close I could've sucked him up my tailpipe or asphyxiated him with exhaust fumes so I couldn't do a stamp on the brake pedal with both feet bit either and the side of the highway had soft shoulders so I couldn't swerve that way either. I was hoping Peter Cottontail would just stay put and I could just sort of straddle the car over him without touching him but oh no, he had to hop when he should have hipped. The bang on the front bumper when I hit him was something I'll never forget. I love animals and would never hurt one intentionally or unintentionally if I could possibly help it. When I looked in my rear view mirror I could see the carcass all stiff and spinning crazily on the centre of the road. Do you know there are actually

people who drive up and down the highway looking for fresh road kills so they can take them home, cook em up and eat them? I kid you not. I could never be so desperate that I'd eat a Thumper off of a bumper.

When Darlene and I got into town we had to make a quick stop at a grocery store before going to the bingo. When we got out of the car I told Darlene I was going to look at the front bumper because I figured the bunny rabbit had left a dent in it from the impact when I hit it. I had cried when I hit the bunny and I was still upset but when I looked at the front bumper I was a even more upset, a whole lot more upset. There hangin by it's ears was the bunny rabbit's head. My God, I'd actually decapitated him. I guess the only thing good about it was the bunny couldn't have suffered any, death had to have been instantaneous. I asked Darlene, "Oh please, take it off of there?", to which she replied, "No way, you did it, you take it off". After about ten minutes of, "You do it" and "No, you do it", neither one of us did it. We just got back in the car and I drove to the church where the bingo was being held. When we got inside I nonchalantly told ole crash Kumquat that there was something stuck to the front bumper of my car and asked him if he would please go out and remove it before bingo started. Ole Crash ever eager to please trotted outside to do his thing which should have actually been my thing but let's not nitpick. Of course I didn't tell him exactly what was stuck to the bumper, I can be a real space cadet when the situation warrants it and the situation warranted it. Besides he wouldn't have gone and done it if I'd told him what the something was, I know I wouldn't have.

A few minutes later ole Crash came trottin back in with a huge grin on his face. Its a good job men don't wear lipstick or he'd have had it on both ears. It seems I had parked the car next to a hedge with a fairly lofty altitude. On the other side of the hedge was a woman cutting her grass with a power lawnmower. Ole Crash had removed said rabbit's head and throwin it right into the path of the woman with the lawnmower when she wasn't looking. I guess I wasn't the only one to have a hare raising experience that night.

Anyway, when I returned home after the bingo, where by the way I didn't win anything, I recounted the night's events to good ole Hubby. Hubby was horrified. He couldn't believe I actually had the nerve to still drive the car. He said if it had of been him he would have parked the car right there and sold it on the spot. Told you didn't I? Well I drove that car for another two years and nothing out of the ordinary or at least out of the ordinary for me happened so it just proved my point that superstitions were indeed stupid, silly and again extremely bad luck for the rabbit. Naturally Hubby didn't agree with me but remember this is Hubby we're talkin about, he may not have always been right but as far as he was concerned he was never wrong. It just wasn't worth the mental or bodily harm to tell him otherwise. I guess that was another reason Hubby and I didn't get along too well, incompatibility, his.

Finally it was time for the big event, the birth bit and as with every other momentous occasion in my life it was complete chaos from beginning to end. To start with good ole Hubby had smucked up our method of transportation so one of his friends who lived up at the sawmill which was about a mile away stayed around the camp which was normally deserted on weekends just so I'd have a ride to the hospital. We had no telephone and the nearest one was about three miles down the highway and even it was iffy when the weather was bad which it usually was during the month of January and it was January. It was an old crank phone. No really it was. I know it's hard to believe in this day and age but the residents of Marten River got their telephone service from some little heard of telephone company which didn't have the money for any better equipment. Heck every time there was a thunderstorm lightening would hit the line and blow the

phone clean off the wall.

I went into labour around five o'clock on Saturday afternoon only I didn't know it was labour, I thought it was just stomach cramps. Ronnie, Hubby's friend who was my standby ride came over to our trailer about seven o'clock with his cousin Ross to play cards with Darlene and I. Hubby was kind of indisposed as he'd been in the hospital earlier in the week and had all his top teeth removed. He just lay in bed higher than a kite on painkillers. Ronnie and Ross had brought a bottle of booze with them to drink while playing cards. When I questioned Ronnie about staying sober in case I went into labour and he had to drive me the forty-four miles in to the hospital, he told me the baby wasn't due for a month so he felt it was okay to have a few and have a few he did, quite a few. He had so many that when he and his cousin left at eleven o'clock he was pissy-face drunk. As he was leaving he jokingly commented about how I'd better not go into labour during the night. Well the joke was on him because about half an hour after he'd left I mentioned the stomach cramps to Darlene and commented on how they seemed to be getting worse. I knew I was in labour because Darlene said, "Oh God, your in labour." I told you I didn't know nothin about childbirth and I wasn't kidding. Darlene donned her coat and boots and hurried up to the camp to get Ronnie, my hero, my ride, the idiot who was so drunk he could barely walk. It's a good job there are two kinds of luck or I wouldn't have had any.

Hubby, bless his little heart decided he'd make the supreme sacrifice and get up out of his nice, comfortable bed, bear the pain of his sore mouth and drive me to the hospital himself in Ronnie's car. Darlene decided she'd come along for the ride. She was armed with a little bag containing towels, string and a pair of scissors. Great, just what I needed, a midwife wannabe. At this point I didn't give a damn if the devil himself drove me as long as I got to the hospital. Darlene, Hubby and I set out at midnight. It was freezing rain and Hubby had to keep stopping every few minutes to scrape the windshield as the window defroster couldn't keep up with the rate at which the ice was building up on the windows. The highway was treacherous because of the ice and Hubby had to drive at a snail's pace to keep control of the car. Just as I figured things couldn't get any worse they did. The automatic choke on the car started sticking and Hubby had a heck of a time keeping the motor running and we were burning gas like it was water running out of a tap. Then to top it all off my labour pains got real intense. Murphy must have been in his glory. Here we were, in a car that didn't want to keep running in a freezing rainstorm, my labour pains were two and a half minutes apart and we were out in the middle of nowhere with twenty some odd miles still to go to get to the hospital, a midwife wannabe watching me with a grin on her face and a Hubby moaning with pain over his sore mouth. You know how they say everyone gets what's coming to them, well I kept thinking, "What in hell did I ever do to deserve this?".

Finally about three a.m. we came to the top of the big hill which would take us down into the city of North Bay and the hospital. At the top of the hill was an all night gas station where we had to stop first as the gas gauge on the car read empty and had for about the last five miles or so. Talk about coming in on a wing and a prayer. Hubby just got enough gas to do until later and within five minutes we were at the entrance doors to the hospital. Hubby and Darlene let me out of the car and then just took off for home and left me standing there. I knew Hubby's mouth was sore and I figured Darlene was a tad disappointed at not being able to deliver the baby herself but they could have at least stuck around for a little while and given me some much needed moral support. Was that too much to ask for, I guess it was.

I entered the hospital and before long I had been admitted, given a thorough going over,

prepped and settled in a room. I was really frightened and a little perplexed at the attitude of the nurses. I thought they would explain what they were doing, why they were doing it and tell me what to expect, they didn't. I found out much later that someone had mistakenly put on my chart that this was my second childbirth and the nurses figured I already knew what was happening. My labour pains continued at two and a half minutes apart all day Sunday. Hubby never made an appearance but my Mom and Dad showed up to see me Sunday night. I was so happy to see them that I started to hyperventilate and the nurse had to ask them to leave. Murphy was really raking in the big bucks for overtime during this episode.

Monday morning found me waiting with labour pains still two and a half minutes apart. At 8:00 a.m. a nurse decided it was time to wheel me down to the delivery room. At 8:05 a.m. my Mom phoned and the nurse in the delivery room with me told her it would all be over by 8:30 a.m. I was so happy, I'd just about had all the pain and suffering I could stand. At 1:00 p.m. I was still on the delivery table waiting for the blessed event. At 1:10 p.m. my doctor came into the delivery room and I let him have it with both barrels. I told him I wasn't going to stand for this anymore and I was getting the hell outta there. Yeah right, like where did I think I was going to go, north to Alaska? Finally at 1:20 p.m. my daughter Melissa May was born. She weighed in at four pounds and twelve ounces, considering I gained fifty-two pounds during my pregnancy I wondered what happened to the other forty-seven pounds and four ounces. Know what, I never did figure out what happened to it, maybe it went north to Alaska?

Three days after the birth of our daughter, good ole Hubby made his first and only appearance at the hospital. I guess he was a little disappointed he didn't get the boy he wanted. Tough noogies Hubby. Since Melissa was so small I didn't get to take her home with me for two very long weeks in which Hubby reverted right back to his old ways of drinking, drinking and drinking.

At the same time Melissa May was born, my dog had eight pups and my cat had five kittens. Like I said, timing was never my strong suit. The first week at home with Missy May was one I'd never want to repeat. Missy May had colic. All she did was scream and cry. My third night home I was sitting in a rocking chair in the living room trying to quiet Missy's screams, the puppies in a big box in one corner of the room were all whining and the kittens in a box in another corner of the room were all meowing. Talk about a nightmare only it wasn't a nightmare I could wake up from, I was awake. Good ole Hubby, what a guy, he got up outta bed, sized up the situation and immediately decided to move out of the house and into the bunkhouse up at the mill where he could have some peace and quiet. His parting comment was, "You wanted the damn thing and now you got it you don't know what to do with it". Boy talk about support and that's all I could do was talk about it cause I sure as heck get any from him, monetary or otherwise.

The same as any new mother I worried constantly over Missy and my lack of experience at being a mom. My biggest worry was the fact we lived forty-four miles from the nearest doctor and hospital. If something went wrong help was a fair bit away. For my daughters sake some drastic changes needed to be made and I made them. Funny eh, for years I let good ole Hubby rule the roost because I was afraid not to but when my daughter was born my concern for her welfare overshadowed my fear of Hubby. Oh don't get me wrong, Hubby wasn't happy about the changes I made, he threw a real hissy fit. I had tried for and gotten a job with Bell Canada in Huntsville and Missy and I were moving. Hubby had a choice, he could either move with us or stay put, he came with us, damn.

Hubby and I relocated from way out in the boonies to a little out in the boonies at a trailer park just outside of Huntsville. Hubby got a job with a local lumber company and for a time, a short time that is, I thought that maybe our relocation was what Hubby had needed and was the answer to our problems, WRONG. Hubby's job necessitated him working away in the bush all week and he only came home on weekends. I thought with him being away all week he'd be happy to spend his time at home on weekends with his wife and daughter, WRONG AGAIN. Since good ole Hubby couldn't indulge in his favorite pastime of drinking himself stupid or stupored from Monday to Friday he made up for it Saturday and Sunday. Although relocation didn't make any big differences in Hubby's lifestyle other than a change of watering holes, for me the differences were like coming out of a very long, very dark night into the light of a bright summers day. Oh I still had to worry about what Hubby would do when he was home on the weekends but I had all week to prepare for the weekends. If I was lucky I'd be scheduled to work all weekend and if not I had all week to find someone to change shifts with so I would be. It was amazing how well Hubby and I got along, heh heh. I loved my job.

At the time Ma Bell was raking in the big bucks (What else is new eh?) and the building was being enlarged which left the employees with no parking lot. For most of Bell's employees this wasn't much of a problem because they lived right in town, for me it was a big problem because I lived outside of town and I had to drive to work. Now I had no objection to parking on the street only to the parking meter and the kumkwat in the uniform that kept leaving little pieces of paper on my windshield and they weren't no love notes neither. My job was very important and necessary, we're talking pre 911 days here. If there was an emergency, people called yours truly, the operator. When an operator plugged into a signal she had to be ready to handle just about anything. Like the time I plugged into a signal and a little ole lady asked, "Central is that you"? Elderly people always referred to the operator as central.

"Yes Ma'am, this is central, how can I help you?", I asked.

"Could you please connect me to the fire department?", she asked.

"Yes Ma'am, right away", I told her.

I connected her to the fire department and as with all calls to an emergency number I stayed on the line to monitor the call and offer any assistance I could.

Dispatcher: Hello fire department.

Lady: Hello, is this the fire department?

Dispatcher: Yes, this is the fire department.

Lady: My name is Mrs. Cassibo. I live at the west end, my house is on fire.

Dispatcher: What is your address?

Lady: I live at the west end, my name is Mrs. Cassibo.

Dispatcher: Where at the west end do you live Mrs. Cassibo? What is your address?

Lady: I don't remember the address.

At this point I grabbed my directory and looked up the name Cassibo. Thank heavens I grew up in the west end, there was only one Cassibo listed on a street at the west end of town. I cut in on the call and asked Mrs. Cassibo if the address was hers and she said it was. Whew, the dispatcher said they were on their way and hung up. Then just when I thought I had everything under control Murphy's Law kicked in.

Mrs. Cassibo: Central are you still there?

Me: Yes I'm still here, can I help you?

Mrs. Cassibo: Central what do I do, the flames are coming closer?

Me: Mrs. Cassibo are you still in the house?
Mrs Cassibo: Yes.
Me: Get out Mrs. Cassibo, get out now!!
Mrs. Cassibo: I can't, I'm crippled, my husband is in the hospital and I can't get out by myself.
Me: It's okay Mrs. Cassibo, don't worry I'll get you out.

Now the Huntsville Fire Department was a volunteer organization and since the fire hall was directly across the street from the Bell building I knew from past experience it would be at the very least some minutes before the firemen could respond to Mrs. Cassibo's call. Luckily I realized the Ontario Provincial Police station was only a couple of minutes away from Mrs. Cassibo's house. I called them and explained the situation and they assured me they would respond immediately. In the meantime I stayed on the line with Mrs. Cassibo reassuring her that help would soon be there. It seemed like forever but in actuality it was only a few minutes before an O.P.P. officer came on the line and said, "It's okay operator, we've got her". Thank heavens it was over. I was amazed at how calmly and professionally I had handled the whole situation. Of course once it was all over it was a different story. I started to shake so bad I couldn't even hang onto one of the cords we plugged in with to answer calls. I had to take an unscheduled but well-deserved break. Anyway as you can see, my job was important and vital.

As I was leaving work after my shift that day I was feeling pretty good about how well I'd handled the situation with Mrs. Cassibo and then I saw the slips of paper on my windshield, parking tickets, three of them. By this point I'd been paying out one hell of a lot of money on parking tickets and I begrudged every damn cent. The day before I'd gone and bought a parking meter permit figuring that would solve the problem, yeah right. I went over to the parking authority to confront them as to why I was still getting parking tickets when I had a parking meter permit. The parking personnel informed me the parking permit was only good for half an hour in one spot. I then enquired as to why I wasn't informed of that little fact when I bought the permit. All I got in the way of a reply was a sadistic little smirk. Who says parking personnel don't enjoy their job? They should wear big signs around their necks that say, GOTCHA. I mean could you see me in a situation like with Mrs. Cassibo saying, "Excuse me, could everyone hold on for a couple of minutes while I run down and put some money in the parking meter or move my car", really eh? Well hell hath no fury like yours truly when I'm ticked off or should I say ticketed off and I'm stubborn, hell I can make a jackass look as mild-mannered as a pussycat of the domestic persuasion.

From that point in time I just let the parking tickets pile up, day after day, week after week. It was the principle of the thing and I'm real big on principles. Don't ever tell me I'm wrong when I know I'm right about something, it ain't worth it. The parking tickets piled up so high I figured I had enough to paper an eight by ten foot room. One night a local county mountie came a-knockin on the door and I figured the day of reckoning had finally arrived. Sure enough he had an arrest warrant for unpaid parking fines and what the total of the fines came to would have made the mighty King Midas shudder. I told the officer to go ahead and arrest me as I had no intention of paying the fines and I wanted my day in court. I was sure once the judge heard my side of the story he'd see things my way. The officer then informed me the arrest warrant wasn't for me, it was for good ole Hubby. Imagination that, pay back time.

It seems my vehicle was registered in Hubby's name making him the one responsible for paying the parking tickets. I loved it and the look on Hubby's face only added to my state of euphoric bliss. It seemed like I was getting even with Hubby at long last and getting out of

paying the parking tickets all in one fell swoop. However it didn't quite work out that way. I told Hubby he'd better pay the officer or else he was going bye-bye. Hubby was sweating bullets. I knew he had blown his pay cheque at the local tavern as usual and I just let him sweat. I had a grin on my face so wide that if I'd been wearing lipstick I would have had it on both ears. At the last possible moment I relented and wrote a cheque to cover the amount owing. The fact Hubby threatened me with serious bodily harm in a whisper so the police officer couldn't hear had a great deal of influence on my decision to pay up. I'd had my moment and what a moment it was.

If you think I went a little overboard about the parking tickets it was nothing compared to what a local well-known attorney did a few months later. He'd gotten a parking ticket but instead of just paying the two dollars he read up on every by-law the town had ever passed and found out the town had never made Main Street, Main Street, it was still in actuality a highway and guess what, you couldn't put parking meters on a highway, well you could but not legally. In other words, every parking ticket the town had ever issued for an expired parking meter on Main Street was invalid. Not surprisingly the town had an emergency meeting the very same night and passed a new by-law making Main Street, Main Street. Can you imagine what lengths the attorney would have gone to if he'd gotten a five dollar ticket, boggles the mind, don't it? When good ole Hubby told me that little story at the time I was kind of glad that the aforementioned attorney was our attorney however, eventually he became Hubby's attorney only and that little story kept haunting me.

Now that Hubby and I had relocated and things were going as well as could be expected I thought it was time to broaden my horizons and Hubby as usual didn't like it one bit. One of the girls I worked with at Bell was taking leathercraft classes. One day she brought some samples of her work from the classes into the office to show me and I was fascinated. The girl told me their was an opening in her class and asked me if I'd like to join. Oh boy would I. When I approached Hubby about it he said, NO!!! Whenever I wanted to do something to better myself Hubby would always veto it. He always said I thought I was too good already. Well if meant I thought I deserved better in life than a drunken abusive husband and the life that entailed then he was right on but I'd never had the nerve or the guts to tell him that. The fact the classes were held Monday nights when Hubby wasn't home, they only lasted for two hours and the class consisted of women only had no effect on Hubby. He was adamant, NO!!! I don't know if it was because I was starting to feel my independence or what but I told good ole Hubby to, "Go to Hell", and joined the class anyway. Boy did I feel good. Hubby didn't take my disobedience lightly and for the first few weeks I took the class he made my life miserable but I stalwartly stood my ground. After awhile Hubby resigned himself to my taking the classes and just let the matter drop. Smart move Hubby. That little victory was just the beginning, it paved the way for me to broaden my horizons even more in what I loved to do best, drive.

Since I had cars and light trucks down pat it was time to move on to the next plateau of transportation, motorcycles, alright!! Back when I first started riding motorcycles women just didn't do that sort of thing. Well pish tush, anybody can do anything if they want to bad enough regardless of age or sex. My Granny Haslam had died the year before and her estate was finally settled giving me the wherewithal to buy me bike. I trotted on down to the local bike shop to have a look see. As soon as I walked in the door I saw her, my dream machine. It was a 175 cc Honda street bike, blue, my favorite colour, with saddlebags, electric start, windshield and dual chrome exhausts. When the sales man came over I said, "I'll take it". So much for haggling over the price. I had to have it, period. I paid the money and told them to deliver it.

When my Honda was delivered dear ole Hubby had a real hissy fit. He thought I was a few bricks short of a full load. His final tirade ended with, "You don't even have a license to drive that thing". I figured no sweat, I'll get one, uh huh. I found out just how superfluous (I've been reading, It Pays To Increase Your Word Power, in Reader's Digest) governmental departments can be, especially the Department of Transportation usually called the D.O.T. Boy talk about bumbling bureaucrats. When I called my local D.O.T. which was twenty-one miles away to enquire what was entailed in getting licensed to drive a motorcycle they told me I'd first have to take a written exam. The story of my life, "First you have to take a written exam". If you apply for a job you have to, first take a written exam. If you apply for any kind of license such as a gun license or permit, you have to first take a written exam. With my luck they'll start making you take a written exam for literary license. I can just picture the scenario when it's my time to leave this ole world. I'll be laying on my deathbed, the good Lord has sent for me and I won't be able to come, why, you got it, because first I'll have to take a damn written exam.

Since Huntsville didn't have it's own licensing office the Department of Transportation came to town every Friday to do testing and issue licenses. The very next Friday I was at the town hall to take it, the damn written test. Of course I passed it with flying colours. I was then issued a little slip of paper which allowed me to ride my little Honda to the site of the driving test two weeks hence. I was also issued a warning, the slip of paper was only valid to ride my bike to the testing site, nothing else. If I failed the driving test then I would have to make arrangements to have my bike taken back home. Typical eh, you couldn't get a license to drive a motorcycle unless you knew how to operate one and you couldn't operate one unless you had a license. Idiotry ranneth rampant. It meant I couldn't legally learn how to drive my bike and yet I was supposed to take a test to prove I knew how to drive it. It was the ole, damned if you do and damned if you don't dilemma. Now I'd had a little previous experience driving a motorcycle when Hubby and I resided in Marten River and a couple of his buds from the sawmill let me try out their bikes but my experience was darn little and certainly no where near enough to pass the test so I did the only thing I possibly could, I broke the law and practiced driving my bike everyday until the test.

The day of the test dawned clear and sunny. Wouldn't you know it eh? For two weeks I drove my bike illegally and it rained every day, the one day I could actually drive my bike legally and the weather was clear and sunny. I guess crime doesn't pay after all. Of course it wouldn't have dared rained on the sanctimonious (Reader's Digest again) heads of those from the mighty D.O.T. There were ten of us trying for our licenses, nine guys and little ole me. The guys were standing off to one side and they kept looking over at me while talking among themselves and snickering. It seemed good ole Hubby wasn't a majority of one in thinking I was a few bricks short. If anything it only made me more determined or stubborn, whichever, to get my license. The examiner said it was time to start and proceeded to explain the first part of the test that had been laid out in the parking lot at the local Department of Highways. First you had to kick start your bike, then zig-zag thru a line of pylons, make a sharp left turn, then get up into second gear and then stop on a little yellow line which by the way you ended up on top of while still trying to get your speed up to shift into second gear. Guess who the examiner chose to go first? Yep, you got it. With a great show of bravado I pushed my bike up to the start line, mounted and proceeded to kick start my trusty little steed. Uh huh, the only thing I kick started was Murphy's Law. I kept kicking and kicking and kicking, zip, zero zilch. It just wouldn't go. I couldn't understand it, I'd practiced kick starting my bike everyday because I knew it was mandatory

during the test and I'd never had any trouble, not once. The nine nitwits on the sidelines were in serious danger of getting hernias from laughing so hard. The examiner, one of the D.O.T.'s finest I might add finally came up with a very helpful suggestion. He leaned over towards me with a smirky little grin on his face and told me it might help if I turned the key on. You know that expression, "I could have just died", well I almost did from sheer mortification. I felt like the north end of a southbound horse. I'm not even gonna try to describe the reaction of the nine nitwits. Suffice it to say if I ever saw one of them again in my lifetime it would be much too soon. After the glow of my very red face subsided I turned the key on, my bike started on the first kick.

Actually the course was sort of like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's famous musical ride. I was a tad flustered starting the course which was understandable so instead of going around the first pylon I ran over it and it sort of popped out from under the rear tire of my bike. I started singing, "Pop goes the weasel", then as I was zig-zagging thru the rest of the pylons I sang, "Go in and out the windows, go in and out the windows", a slight bit juvenile but appropriate. Once out of the pylons I broke into, Little Honda (The Hondells - 1964) "First gear, alright, second gear, lean right", I went left, I then speedily ended my medley with The Supreme's, "Stop in the name of love", when I got to the little yellow line. Okay so it wasn't the R.C.M.P.'s famous musical ride but it was my famous ride and it was musical. One by one the nine nitwits did their bit and I'll admit albeit grudgingly that they probably did it with slightly more aplomb than I did but I'll bet my little bit was more memorable. Leave em laughing even if you didn't mean to, that's my motto.

The second portion of the driving test took place on Main Street. You had to do a figure eight around two town blocks obeying all the rules of the road and using hand signals for turns. We were to go one at a time and once we completed our mathematical meander the examiner would deliver his decision. I don't know why but it was lady last for this part of the test. All nine nitwits got to go ahead of me and every one of them got their license. This made me nervous as I'd heard that there was always one person who failed no matter what and naturally the ninth nitwit was kind enough to remind me of that very fact just before my turn. Well I'm happy to say that little bit of hearsay is just that, hearsay. I got my license and I got it on the first attempt. I sang Bobby Fuller's, I Fought The Law, all the way home only instead of singing, "I fought the law and the law won", I sang my version, "I fought the law and I won, tra la la la la la".

I don't want you to get the idea that Hubby resigned himself to my independence willingly or that I wasn't still afraid of him because I definitely was. One time my parents were visiting some friends in Huntsville. They were going to attend a wedding and they invited me to join them. Hubby didn't seem adverse to my going so I had my parents pick me up and off we went. I was looking forward to spending the evening with Mom and Dad in a happy atmosphere free of stress, in other words without Hubby. Around eleven p.m. I called home to check with Hubby who was babysitting Missy. Hubby was furious. He thought I had just meant I was attending the wedding not the reception and dance afterwards. Hubby ordered me to come home immediately in a tone of voice I wasn't about to argue with. Mom and Dad weren't too thrilled at having to take me home but they didn't give me a hassle about it. I guess they realized Hubby was about all the hassle I could handle.

When I got home I listened to Hubby rant and roar. He carried on like I'd done something despicable but I never said a word. Inside I was furious. How dare Hubby treat me like a little child needing his permission to go out with my own parents for an evening. He treated me like I

couldn't be trusted for heaven's sake.

The lack of trust on Hubby's part had no basis in fact from any of my actions during our married life. Hubby only believed what he wanted to believe, like the time when we first moved to Marten River and my nerves got bad. He accused me of having an affair with the doctor because he didn't want to admit there was a problem. Yupper, that must of been some affair considering the doctor was located in a town one hundred and thirty some odd miles from where Hubby and I lived and I had never met him prior to the day Hubby took me to see him. I'm not exactly sure when I got to indulge shall we say in my so-called extra marital activity because Hubby very seldom let me use the car and when he did he it was never long enough for me to have gone that far. Oh well I guess it doesn't matter, I'm sure Hubby had it all worked out in his mind. Anyway, I'm sure you get the idea. If there was a problem no matter what it was, I was responsible because I was having an affair. Boy, with the problems Hubby and I had I must of been one busy little woman. I wonder if I enjoyed myself?

After relocating to Huntsville anytimes I got to go anywhere without Hubby so I could actually relax and enjoy myself except for work of course were few and far between and the same thing could apply to the number of times Hubby and I had any kind of an active sex life during the later years of our marriage. I said Hubby and I, it seems Hubby had a more active sex life than I, it just wasn't at home and it wasn't with me. So much for togetherness but that was okay with me. Honestly could you get all hot and bothered with a guy who reeked of alcohol, mumbled unintelligently and couldn't seem to keep it together long enough to get it together? Well me neither. I know Hubby had what is termed extra marital affairs because he'd come home drunk, have pangs from a guilty conscience and tell me about it. Yeah right, like I really wanted to hear all the gory details. I remember one such time. I find it funny now but at the time I was absolutely terrified. I don't mean terrified that I'd lose my Hubby to another woman, heck no, I couldn't have been that lucky, I mean terrified for my life.

You see good ole Hubby unbenounced to me was keeping company so to speak with a girl I'd attended school with. This girl had been a little rough around the edges when we'd attended school together. Well now after serving time at a penal institution for borrowing a police cruiser and not asking permission first to do so she was really rough and not just around the edges. You've heard the expression, Gentlemen don't kiss and tell, well for once in his life good ole Hubby was a gentleman so much so that he never told me he'd had a relationship with this girl before we got together and when we got married he forgot to inform her the relationship with her was over. Naturally it didn't matter to Hubby because when this girl was released from the penal institution he just continued on where he'd left off with her. However, the situation mattered to the girl. She explained to Hubby in very vivid detail how she was going to disencumber him from me and she also told him what kind of knife she was going to use to do it. Of course good ole Hubby had to come home and tell me all about how his not so ex- girlfriend was going to dispose of me. I guess that was Hubby's version of whispering sweet nothings in my ear.

It's one thing to have a husband cheat on his wife and her know about it but I think it's just a bit much for the same woman to have to fear for her safety because of her Hubby's so called extra curricular activities, don't you? Hubby was really feeling bad about the whole situation and wanted my sympathy. Can you believe it? If I hadn't been so scared at the time I probably would have seen the utter ridiculousness of the whole episode. Also Hubby admitted that he was afraid of the girl. Great, here was my six foot, heavy duty husband who's greatest joy in life was to

shed anybody's blood but his own and he's afraid of his ex- girlfriend who is about four foot eight and weighs less than a hundred pounds. I guess what they say is true, "It's not quantity that counts, it's quality". Not a very good analogy maybe but it'll do. It soon became apparent that Hubby didn't have a clue as to how to handle things so it was Donna to the rescue. It wasn't my marriage I was trying to protect, heck Id given up that stupid notion a while back, wouldn't you if you'd had the marriage I'd had? Your darn tootin you would. No it was my life I was trying to protect. Now that's motivation with a capital M.

My solution to the problem sounds very simple but believe me it wasn't. I confronted the girl and told her if she wanted my husband she was more than welcome to him and she didn't have to hone her knife carving skills to do it. I told her I'd even initiate divorce proceedings immediately. Wouldn't you just know it, she decided she didn't want my good ole Hubby after all. Talk about rotten luck. Of course it would have served Hubby right if she had taken him, it would have been his just dessert and one he definitely deserved.

Over the next year or so and thru my job with Ma Bell I made new friends and discovered there were a lot of things I could do for myself. I discovered contrary to what good ole Hubby said that I didn't need him for a crutch, in fact he was using me for a crutch. Once I realized that little fact it dawned on me that I could make it on my own with my daughter and I gave Hubby his walking papers so fast he never knew what hit him. Hubby threw the hissy fit to end all hissy fits and it did end them I mean, it was the last hissy fit he got to throw with me as his wife. I was determined that my daughter was going to grow up in as normal an atmosphere as possible. I didn't want her to see the kind of relationship between her father and I and think that it was an acceptable way of life because it was anything but. That fact alone gave me the strength to stick to my decision to end my marriage. Spunky eh? Well maybe not real spunky because I was still afraid of Hubby and as soon as I threw him out of the house, not literally, I had my brother-in-law come over and change all the door locks and screw nail all the windows shut from the inside. See I wasn't stupid all my married life, I did take half an hour off once and what a once it was.

The next morning I went to a lawyer and had separation papers drawn up stating I was to have custody of Missy. I wanted Hubby to realize our separation wasn't a temporary arrangement and I also wanted to make sure Hubby couldn't use our daughter to get back at me. The next hurdle was to get Hubby to sign the separation papers so they'd be legal. It wasn't an easy task especially when Hubby got struck by lightening the night before he was supposed to sign them and both his hands were burned. When I got the call from the mill where Hubby worked telling me about his accident I immediately went to him to be by his side in his time of need, yeah right, bullpucky. The only reason I went was to manipulate Hubby the same way he had manipulated me for years. I pretended I really cared and I did to some extent but not to the extent that I made Hubby believe I did just so he'd show up at my lawyer's office the next morning to sign the papers, bandaged hands and all. I don't know how I managed to convince Hubby to do it but he did, he actually signed the papers. I was so relieved. Now I had legal custody of Missy and Hubby couldn't hurt either of us again. Before long Melissa and I moved to North Bay so I could be near my parents. I was starting an exciting yet frightening chapter in my life and I needed all the support I could get.

CHAPTER FIVE: SCHOOL DAYS, SCHOOL DAYS (PARTY, PERSISTENCE, POOPED)

Raising a child alone is no picnic at the best of times but I never regretted my decision, not even for one moment. There's an old saying that goes, "Life begins at fifty", uh uh, my life began the day Hubby and I separated. Don't get me wrong, life was just as hard but in a different way. The difference being I didn't have to worry about Hubby coming home drunk and disorderly and doing a number on me or our daughter and that made all the difference. If you've ever lived with an alcoholic then you know exactly what I mean if you haven't then count your blessings. I was a new person, literally. I took off fifteen of the twenty years I'd aged during the nine years I was with good ole Hubby. People are being told everyday to change their eating habits and such for a happier, healthier lifestyle, well I didn't do much toward changing my eating habits but I did change the such, namely my matrimonial state and PRESTO CHANGEO I was happier and healthier almost immediately. When people asked me, "What does your husband do?", my reply was, "He's my ex-husband and he drinks". It was short, simple and very much to the point so I wasn't usually bothered by a second question.

It was during this time that I got the first of the two speeding tickets I've received in my many years of driving. I was using my Mom's car to take my daughter to the baby sitter's because of course I still couldn't afford my own set of wheels I'd had to sell my beloved little Honda when my marriage ended. It was like saying goodbye to an old and trusted friend. Quite frankly I felt worse about selling my little Honda than I did about ending my marriage. Anyway it was 6 a.m. and I was on my way to the baby sitter's to drop Missy off. I had gotten a job driving for a local diaper service, yeah, it was pretty breathtaking alright. I kept taking deep breaths with my head stuck out the window of the delivery van and holdin em as long as I could when my head was in the van.

I saw the local county mountie with his radar set up and I remember thinking I pity whoever he nabs because he probably hasn't even had his morning coffee yet and isn't in morning mode. I dropped Missy off and on the way home I totally forgot about the radar rat. Guess who his first victim was? Who else eh? I was some upset. To complicate matters I wasn't wearing my seat belt and I hadn't changed my address on my drivers license. Damn little details. Now I have to admit the officer was pretty nice, he didn't give me a ticket for not wearing my seat belt and he didn't give me one for having the wrong address on my drivers license, he just gave me the speeding ticket. By the time I got back to Mom's with her car I was in tears, I was damn upset at getting my first ticket ever after having driven over ten years without getting caught (parking tickets don't count cause you ain't behind the wheel when you get them) and besides that money was really, really tight. I was working part-time but by the time I paid the baby sitter out of my paycheck and bought the bare essentials there was absolutely nothing left. When I walked into my folk's house still in tears they were all concerned as to why until I told them what happened then they had a hard time trying not to laugh. Okay, okay so it was only a speeding ticket but it was me who got it, ME, the female counterpart of the great and revered road warriors, oh the humiliation.

The ticket cost me fifty-nine dollars and a few points off my driver's license not to mention a good, healthy chunk of my dignity. A guy who was a friend of the family's mistakenly thought he was a comedian and gave me a card congratulating me on my first speeding ticket and a pair of earrings shaped like little turtles with a note saying I should be driving at their speed. I was not amused. JACKASS.

Shortly after the ticket episode my part-time job ended when the company I'd been working

for went out of business so I had to seek employment elsewhere which I did in the way of two part-time jobs. No I wasn't greedy, just needy. The first part-time job saw me as a car-jockey. I picked up and delivered cars and trucks all over the province of Ontario for a local car dealership, what a hoot, well most times it was, there were a few exceptions. Like the time I had to drive a van that didn't have a radio for nine hours straight. Driving and music are synonymous to me, you can't do one without the other, well you can I guess but it's not near as much fun and who'd want to anyway? Not me but in this particular case I didn't have much choice. Why on earth anybody would order a van or any vehicle for that matter without a radio defies logic, well mine anyway. Do you have any idea what it's like to have to sing to yourself for nine hours? Obviously you've never heard me sing acupello or otherwise. The canary legs I got, the voice of a nightingale I don't. For some reason the word horrendous always comes to mind when I think about that particular trip.

Being a car jockey takes a lot of stamina. You have to be ready to go God knows where, to drive Heaven only knows what, in the Devil's own weather with if your lucky, twenty minutes notice. I loved it or else I wouldn't have been doing it especially since the pay was thirty-two dollars a trip no matter what with what being anything from a five to nineteen hour round trip. I really got to know the province of Ontario intimately if you can get intimate with a province that is and I guess you can, I certainly couldn't get intimate with anything or anybody else, who the heck had time? Not me.

One of the tricks I learned was the twenty minute power nap. It seems the human body does indeed have an internal clock and the sucker works. On one particularly long and I might add boring trip (I'd been that way before, I liked to travel different highways, you know the adventurous bit) I was having trouble keeping my heavenly hazels open and before you say anything if people with blue eyes can have their eyes referred to as baby blues than I can categorize my hazel coloured eyes as heavenly hazels. Anyway, I pulled the station wagon I was driving over to the side of the highway and told myself, "Self, your a lone woman out here on this deserted ole highway all by yourself with no help for miles but if you don't get a little nap your going to crack up this here wagon. So you are going to close your heavenly hazels and sleep for twenty minutes, no more no less and when you wake up in twenty minutes you will be refreshed and raring to go". Know what, it worked, it actually worked. When I woke up and checked my watch I'd slept for twenty minutes, no more no less and I was wide awake and rarin to go. Now if someone had told me previously that a the body's internal clock actually worked and that a twenty minute nap had the power to refresh a body (I guess that's why it's called a power nap) I'd have accused them of driving with two wheels in the ditch. You learn something new all the time eh?

The next thing I learned is that you can sleep anywhere in any position if the circumstances warrant it and if you just so happen to be suffering from severe sleep deprivation, well it helps. Once in awhile I'd have to go pick up a vehicle and bring it back and there wouldn't be one to deliver wherever in exchange so I'd end up greyhound bound. Now anyone who's ever had to take a bus anywhere knows that riding a bus is parallel to riding in one of those cattle transport trucks. Your herded into the bus, it's overcrowded to the point of ridiculousness and it smells bad, real bad. On this particular trip I had to ride a bus for twelve hours to a destination that I had never heard of and was so small it wasn't even a dot on any map. Boy talk about being nowhere bound with Greyhound. Now I'm definitely not a person who would cause their poor body unnecessary pain or suffering but for some strange reason it just seems to happen. It's

probably that damn Murphy, anyway it's not something I would do on purpose.

For instance, I had been up since six a.m. I had done the usual mother and Suzy homemaker bit all day and finally got to really relax around nine p.m. when I put my daughter to bed. Is it my fault that ten minutes later I get a call to be on the midnight bus to heaven knew where from my boss? No, of course it wasn't. If I'd had a little notice I could have gone doo-doze for the afternoon.

Midnight found me on the bus with a twelve hour trip to my destination ahead of me with a u-turn at my destination and at least an eight hour return trip to drive to get back to base. Whoopee. Until this point in time the only place I could sleep for more than twenty minutes was sprawled out in my own bed. Of course that's not to say I couldn't sleep just as well sprawled out in another bed, I just hadn't had much occasion to check it out. So here I was, nowhere bound with Greyhound, no sleep for the last eighteen hours and no hope of any sleep for at least another twenty-two hours. Whoopee, whoopee. The goings on inside the bus weren't very conducive to getting any rest either.

There was a couple two seats back of me on the very back seat making hay while the sun wasn't shining. There was a drunk in the seat directly across from me who was snoring in the keys of c and g with his mouth open and saliva running down his chin and there was a macho man wannabe sitting in the seat directly in front of me who keep looking over the seat leeringly at me and making lewd and obnoxious suggestions. A few carefully chosen, subtle words took care of him, the words being, "Back off Bozo. What part of no don't you understand? Is it the N or the O?". There was a young mother who's three offspring were holding, "Who can wail the loudest", tryouts and finally there was a group of seven teenyboppers who were trying to see how much noise they could make and how much they could drink from the bottles they had hidden in their jacket fronts before the bus driver threw them off the bus. Uh huh, just the normal run of the mill bus ride.

So I said to myself, "Self, you're tired and you're going to get a whole lot tireder before this little jaunt ends so you are going to have to do something about it. Wouldn't it be better to sleep on the bus while you've got nothing better to do? Now I know you don't want to miss a minute of all the exciting goings on around you but sometimes a body's gotta do what a body's gotta do. Now just close those heavenly hazels, let nature take it's course and pray God is merciful and you can actually sleep and block out part of this ride to hell in a diesel, demolition derelict. Wait, what if that yahoo macho man wannabe in front waits till I'm asleep and then comes back and starts doing things while I'm sleeping? I would wake up wouldn't I? I mean I'd know, wouldn't I? Oh for Pete's, how dumb could you be, of course you'd know, twit".

Now I don't want you to think that I spend a lot of time talkin to myself because you know what they say about people who talk to themselves and since I don't have any money and as far as I know I'm playin with a full deck and I don't have a rabbit named Harvey although I do have a guinea pig named Honey that hops around like a rabbit and purrs like a kitten, it does, honestly, I think it's best if we just don't discuss the reasons why I talk to myself on occasion, besides that I might wonder too far and get lost, heh heh. However, I do want it understood that when I do say something I listen because I'm worth listening to. Well I must have been pretty persuasive because I woke up six, glorious, peaceful hours later, so refreshed I couldn't get goin for rarin. So you see I found I could sleep on a bus, like I said before, you learn something new everyday.

The final and most important thing I learned while being a car jockey was always be prepared and by being prepared I don't mean carrying an ample supply of latex condoms. Boy some

people only have one thing on their minds, perverts. No, I mean carrying things like a ski-doo suit in bad weather, gas line anti-freeze in extremely cold weather, a cloth to dry off the distributor cap in wet weather and a few little tools in case of mechanical failure. Of course no emergency kit is complete without the two most important pieces of equipment, the baling wire and black tape. On one six hour round trip the weather was extremely cold and the van I was bringing back wasn't at all thrilled at facing the elements. About thirty-five miles from home base the van got real temperamental. There I was out on the dark, deserted highway, solo, trying to drive a van with a bad case of hiccups, a heater blowing nothing but cold air, dressed in an itty bitty jacket and wearing a pair of double-clutching boots that had seen better days years earlier, whoopee. I was solo alright, so low because I figured the sucker was gonna quit on me and I'd have to hoof it for miles up the dark ole highway in the bitter cold before I'd be able to find anyone to help me. Whoopee, whoopee, ding. Well good ole Murphy must have been too comfy cozy to come out in the inclement weather because the van didn't quit till I got to the next service station which was a good fifteen miles up the road. Will wonders ever cease?

Now you'd think because I was driving all brand fire new vehicles that I wouldn't have to worry about there being any mechanical problems, well you'd think wrong. In the two years I car jockeyed I bet I drove every vehicle that came off that particular car manufacturers line that had a mechanical bug-a-boo. Not to mention any names but this particular car manufacturer's advertising campaign is built around the quality they put into their products, yeah right. Just don't believe everything you hear, somebody could be telling whoppers, big ones, take my word for it, heh heh. Anyway, I think you get my point about always being prepared.

My second part-time job also involved driving. I was a delivery person for a chinese food take out establishment. It was thru this job that I got my second and hopefully last if I have anything to do with it speeding ticket. I was boppin along on one of the city's two one-way streets, returning to the shop after doing my very first delivery when an officer, but certainly not a gentleman, popped out from behind some bushes at the side of the street and flagged me down. Sneaky G D son of a B. He informed me I was doing ten whole klicks over the posted speed limit. Well, put me in handcuffs and read me my rights, I'm a baad girl. Who the hell decides these speed limits anyway, a herd of turtles? I mean get real, it was only ten klicks, not thirty or forty, I wasn't in a residential or school zone area and there wasn't another car or person in sight. Jeepers creepers, it wasn't as if I was an escapee from a demolition derby. Anyway, the ticket came to twenty some dollars and my pride took another beatin but due to my incredible fortitude I got thru it. The fact the delivery car was well known to the local constabulary due to the amount of speeding tickets my predecessor accumulated certainly didn't help matters any. I realized I wasn't going to get away with nothin as long as I was behind that particular wheel. Bummer. I did enjoy the job though. My boss was a real sweetie. One night while doing a delivery I inadvertantly locked the keys in the car and had to call my boss to bring me a spare set. I thought he was gonna be really riled but he wasn't. Of course the fact I burst into tears when he showed up with the spare keys may have helped. Yupper, when in doubt turn on the waterworks.

I think the best part of the job was people's reaction to a girl delivering their food. Back then there weren't any other female delivery boys. I got a lot of, "Holy ____, it's a girl". The customer would then feel so guilty about swearing in front of me they'd redeem themselves by giving me a big tip. Boy did I ever make good tips, lots of BIG tips.

The delivery car was one of those little foreign jobbies that was economical to drive and a lot of fun. I always felt like I was driving one of those little dinky cars that kids play with and above

all else it had a great radio. Most times it was mechanically sound except for the time I was zippin down the bypass at eighty clicks and the steering seized solid. I couldn't turn left or right. Boy talk about gettin a persons adrenaline going, mine was doin ninety-five in a fifty zone. Luckily I was in the right hand lane, you know the one for slow pokeys, I just threw on the ole four ways and slowed down nice and easy. I don't know how since the steering wouldn't turn even a little but when I finally stopped I was on the side of the highway, more or less. I think the main reason being the Department of Transportation hadn't followed through on their promise to improve the condition of the highway, thank heavens they were a big bunch of blowhards or I could have ended up southbound on a northbound lane and in all likelihood ended up pushin up daisies. On occasion I do manage to have some good luck and that was one of them.

Speaking of luck, I'm one of those people who actually believe in it. Yeah yeah, I know, there's a scientific explanation for everything. Well science was never my best subject. I'd rather believe in luck, it's a whole lot less work. I've been in too many situations where I just got out by the skin of my ninny not to believe in luck. Besides after getting through a particularly hard time who the heck wants to rehash the whole thing all over again trying to figure it out? Not me. I'd much rather get right on into the next situation or else I'd probably end up with a backlog and I wouldn't want to push my luck, heh heh.

During the time I was working my two part-time jobs I became quite energy conscious, well sort of. The fact I had moved into a nice, little house across the street from my parents had a lot to do with my conserving energy. I didn't know if what I kept hearing about the energy crisis was as bad as people seemed to think it was but I was determined to do my part so I didn't do windows, just kidding, wrong type of energy eh? Blonde moment. Okay, seriously now, having your home re-insulated seemed high on the list of priorities. I was happy to say that my home had been completely re-insulated. Of course it had a lot to do with the previous residents who took all the insulation with them when they moved. I kid you not, they had just loaded it all up into green garbage bags and away they went. Now I'm a generous, giving person but that was a little above and beyond. Left me to bloody freeze to death they did. Take the shirt off of my back but for heaven's sake leave my damn insulation alone.

Another priority on the energy conservation list was keeping your heating system in top working order. Being a conscientious person I had called my fuel company and requested that they clean my furnace and give it the once over. Once again I'm sorry to say my motives were not completely for conservation.

At the time a pair of bats had found my furnace to be an ideal nesting place. Over a very short period of time, mommy and daddy bat raised a whole battalion of little bats and I was literally besieged by them. Up until that point I had always been a tad nervous of bats, (okay, okay, a lot nervous) however in time the battle of the bats left me totally un-nerved.

My first run in with the bat beasties came at two a.m. as I was returning home from one of my part-time jobs. I walked in my front door, turned on the light and was greeted by the flutter of little wings, about two dozen little wings. I was outta there so fast it's a wonder I didn't get whiplash. Luckily my folks lived right across the road. My Dad told me to sleep there and come morning we'd go over to my house and take care of the bats. Uh huh, come morning there wasn't any sign of any bat whatsoever. I'm sure Dad thought I was smoking wacky tabaccy.

The following two nights were exactly the same. The bats would be flying all around inside my house when I'd get home from work and when I'd take Dad over the next morning there would be no sign of the little suckers. Okay so I was in stupid mode, but I didn't have bats in the

belfry, they were in the livingroom. Since I'd never had a whole lot of inclination or experience towards dealing with bats how the heck was I supposed to know they were nocturnal (they only worked nights). I was getting tired of sleeping on my parents couch especially since I had a perfectly good bed across the street in what was then being referred to as the bat cave. It was time for action.

The next night Dad was waiting for me when I got home from work, all ready to do battle armed with a fish landing net. If you've ever seen the Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy then you've got a fair idea of what my Dad looked like chasing bats around my house with his net, minus the tutu and tights of course. He wasn't real graceful either. Once we caught the bats then we had to figure out what to do with them. If we let them go outside they'd just go back down the chimney and into the house again. We were left with no other choice, we had to exterminate them. I don't know why but this turned out to be a complicated endeavour. Once we caught a bat in the net we'd take it (still in the net) outside and whack it up against the side of the house to stun it, stab it with a stick and then dump into a barrel of water. A little drastic maybe but we did get the desired results. God only knows what my neighbors thought about the goings on at my place but the title Batwoman came up regularly. One neighbor did suggest I light a fire under the barrel of bats, have a block party and serve bat soup. We were not amused.

It soon became apparent that mommy and daddy bat were much more proficient at breeding little bats than we were at catching them. A local pest control expert came to my rescue with a spray guaranteed to solve my problem. I will admit the spray did lay the little critters to rest but in my furnace and pipes. Now the problem was how to remove their poor little bodies to their final resting place. The solution was simple, have my furnace cleaned, hence the call to my fuel company.

The fuel company said they wouldn't be able to get around to my furnace for about a month. Well I'm not a furnace repairman's daughter for nothing, I informed the fuel company that there was a strong oil smell coming from my basement. The repairman was at my house in less than an hour. I was being slightly untruthful (okay, okay, I lied) but drastic measures were being called for.

I was feeling some trepidation as the repairman was of a very advanced age so I took the precaution of looking up the number of the local paramedics in the telephone book just in case. I can't put in print the comments the repairman made as he cleaned my furnace and pipes but I at least conducted myself admirably besides plugging my ears so I wouldn't feel so guilty that is. Upon completion of the clean out, the repairman called me downstairs to show me the bucketfuls of dead bats (SURPRISE SURPRISE) he had collected from my furnace and pipes. I had what I feel was the grace, although some might say the nerve to look what I hoped was horrified and say, "My goodness, where on earth did they come from?" I know sometimes I can't believe me either.

My Dad put a piece of screen over the top of my chimney and I had no further problems with bats. After a while people finally stopped calling my house the bat cave and no longer referred to me as Batwoman. I also got over my fear of bats. I still wouldn't go out of my way to befriend one like set up bat houses or feeders but at least now I don't get all bent out of shape when I encounter one. As a matter of fact about a year ago I was uptown doin some errands and there was a bat on the sidewalk. He'd fallen off a ledge directly above the door which he was laying in front off. I figured the first time someone opened the door the poor little critter would get crushed so I carefully picked him up and put him back up on the ledge. He thanked me, he did,

maybe not in so many words but his little expression said it all.

If the energy crisis was as bad as people said it was and conservation was needed then I did my part. Although I don't think my motives were exactly what conservationists had in mind, the end results were the same and that's what counted, wasn't it?

I liked my two part-time jobs okay but I decided that they weren't something I wanted to do for the rest of my life, it was time to make some changes. Over the years I've learned that when opportunity knocks you grab it with both hands and hang on real tight. Just don't grab it around the neck or you could be defeating your own purpose. No one in my immediate family had ever gone to college and I was determined to be, "THE ONE". Back during my teenage years, (Mom and Dad refer to them as the trial and tribulation years, I was very trying and they went thru a lot of tribulation), anyway back then when I quit school in all my gloriously youthful stupidity I didn't see any sense in wasting any more of my life learning. My parents tried to talk me out of it but who listens to parents? Well it took awhile but I finally decided my folks were right. Actually it took fifteen years for me to come to that conclusion but at least no-one could accuse me of rushing into it, heh heh.

It takes a person with unbelievable gall to apply for admission to college with only a grade eight education so naturally I did and miraculously was accepted at the local community college. I did have to first take a you know what, (a damn written exam), but you really do learn a lot from life's experiences and boy had I had experiences, I passed the exam. This ole world has a lot of wonders and I'm one of them or so I've been told. People are always saying to me, "You know I wonder about you". Heh heh, if they wonder too far they'll get lost.

The teenyboppers I attended college with were fresh out of high school and they thought they had it tough, well they didn't have a clue. I guess that's why they were there, to get clued in. Here I was, a single parent raising a seven year old daughter, working part-time and attending college full time on very limited funds. It wasn't easy. The following story appeared in the college newspaper. My instructor got a real kick out of it and had it published without telling me. The day the paper came out people kept pointing at me while whispering among themselves and then they'd laugh. Needless to say I didn't have a clue what was going on so I guess the teenyboppers weren't the only ones there that needed to be clued in. Here's the story as it appeared in the paper.

You Think You've Got It Tough?

We'll begin with yesterday which was Monday. My day started at the usual time, 6 a.m. I fed my daughter breakfast, made the beds, tidied up the house and waved my daughter off to school by 8:20 a.m. This particular day I missed all of my classes as I was finally getting long-awaited dental work done. I figured no problem. I actually thought I was ahead of things as I had done an economics assignment on Sunday which wasn't due until later in the week.

I finished at the dentist about 11:30 a.m. From there I went to my part-time job where I worked until 2 p.m. Next I went up to the college's media centre to book out a camera for interviews coming up the next morning. By this time my mouth was really bothering me and I looked forward to going home and getting an hour of sleep before my daughter got home from school.

I arrived home at about 3:15 p.m., waiting on my doorstep was a man from the gas company and he informed me they were going to lay gas pipe into my house. I was converting from oil to gas heat. The men from the gas company worked outside digging until 7 p.m. making the house vibrate all the while. Scratch the nap.

Next on my agenda was to watch the city council meeting on television at 7:30 p.m. I had previously gotten permission from my journalism instructor to do this instead of personally attending as I figured my mouth would hurt like hell after the visit to the dentist, I figured right. At 7:15 p.m. I had the television tuned in to the right channel and was patiently waiting. At precisely 7:20 p.m. my father, who was installing my new furnace called me downstairs to hold a pipe for him. The fact I tripped at the top of the stairs and landed at the bottom of the stairs face first in the cat's litter box has nothing to do with the story but it really ticked me off. I returned upstairs at 7:45 p.m. and found I had missed the first part of the meeting on television. The cat however, didn't miss. As I walked by the refrigerator which he was sitting on top of, out came a paw and I ended up with claw marks up the left side of my face. I don't know what his problem was, maybe he didn't like me sniffing around so to speak in his litter box.

I managed to watch the rest of the meeting without further interruption. My plan had been to write my council stories as soon as the meeting was over. The reason for this was I had an interview the next morning at the same time as my city council class so I wouldn't have time to do it in class. Well I was tired, my mouth was sore and my face was hurting as well so I thought I'd do it Tuesday night instead, uh huh.

Tuesday I did three interviews for stories for the college newspaper. I visited a friend at the district jail and was home by 3 p.m. At 3:30 p.m. a friend called and asked if I would look after her daughter for awhile. Being a kind person I agreed and thought to myself that right after supper I would write my three stories on the council meeting plus my three stories for the college newspaper.

At 5:30 p.m. I began writing. At 6 p.m. my father showed up to work on my furnace making a lot of noise and doing a lot of loud banging. Very conducive to good writing I must say. The phone rang at least six times before 7 p.m. Miss Personality Plus, that's me.

At 7:30 p.m. a man from the gas company came to start my furnace. The next thing I knew my whole house was full of smoke. My daughter was in tears and the dog was going nuts. I put the dog outside on her chain and enquired of my father and the man from the gas company if they

knew what they were doing to which they replied, "Certainly". Yeah right, I was already nervous about having a gas furnace and their actions so far hadn't done a heck of a lot towards alleviating my fears.

I sat back down at the typewriter to continue writing. My daughter then informed me that the dog had piddled twice on the floor before I'd put her out, the dog I mean, not my daughter and there was a salesman at the door. At 8 p.m. another man from the gas company showed up at my front door. By this time my disposition was anything but sunny and I informed the man that it was alright to use the back door and the dog (still chained to the back door) wouldn't bite. The man then informed me he had already tried to get in the back door and my dog did indeed bite. Oh well, you can't win em all.

At 10 p.m. my daughter finally calmed down and went to sleep. The smoke was gone and my new furnace was working fine. My father went home to relax. I managed to get my three stories written for the college newspaper but I didn't have a clue if they made sense or not. My house smelled of smoke and was a total mess. I still had my three council stories to write, I had to make my daughter's lunch for school, do the dishes and clean the house before I could go to bed. The next morning I had to get to school extra early so I could use the darkroom before classes.

Well it's now the next morning. I'm handing this story in about the days of my life to my instructor with a request that he read this first before he marks my other assignments so maybe he won't judge me too harshly.

The End

I'm happy to say he didn't, judge me too harshly that is. He was so impressed by the days of my life and that's why he had it published in the college newspaper. Now I know writers are supposed to be thrilled when their work is published but the jury is still out on that one of mine. I didn't know whether to be pleased as punch or embarrassed all to hell and I'm still not sure and that happened over ten years ago. Remember, I'm not one to make snap decisions, heh heh.

I'm the type of person who for my own personal satisfaction wants to do well at whatever I'm doing and college was no exception. One day during english class our professor wanted us to write a sentence using two homonyms. Oh you know, two words that sound the same but have different meanings and spelling. I don't want to brag but I can't help myself. My sentence was,

"The farmer wondered whether the wether would weather the weather or whether the wether would die". I'd used not two but three homonyms and I'd used all three twice in the same sentence. Brilliant or what? By the way, for those not in the know a wether is a sheep. Aced that one I did.

Another subject I did well in was economics. That one was a cinch. Take a person who has never had any money to speak of and yet has managed to keep herself and her child fed, clothed and sheltered and you've got a woman who's incredibly ingenious at making ends meet or else a hooker. I was incredibly ingenious, besides I hate working nights which wouldn't have made for a very happy hooker which by the way hasn't got a thing to do with driving a tow truck. I was a whiz at making ends meet which got me an A in economics. Pretty elementary eh?

I found psychology 101 quite interesting and timely too. For instance, one time our instructor showed us a film about a tribe of natives in Africa. It was very educational but a bit gory towards the end where the men of the tribe ate raw pig entrails. The thought of it still makes me gag. Anyway I couldn't stomach any more of the film so I left class early and decided to go to the cafeteria for an early lunch. Three guesses as to the daily special, uh huh, you got it, hot pork sandwiches. Like I said, real timely. Wow Murphy, good one. Oh heck who wanted to eat lunch anyway? I mean heaven forbid that I put on an extra ounce, I've only been twenty-five pounds underweight all my adult life, why mess things up now?

College wasn't easy but it had it's moments like when I got an A or when I went partying with my classmates who gave a whole new meaning to the words party hardy. The first party I got invited to was at a residence on campus. I was determined to show my peers that I could fit right in even though I was a little bit older than them. Oh alright, quite a bit older than them. I couldn't stay too long as it was my bowling night. I had joined a league and was on a team with my parents. The party was a blast, I had no idea what I drank but whatever it was sure had a kick to it. After a few of the brew I was really flying and kickin up my heels. I was high on life, well actually I think the pot I'd smoked may have had a tad to do with it. It was the first and last time I smoked pot. Hell I have enough trouble handling three drinks of liquor in a year. I sure didn't need wacky tabaccy to act stupid, I could do that quite naturally all by myself with no artificial inducements. By the time I left the party to meet my folks at the bowling alley I was blind, blind drunk that is. Imagination that eh, me blind drunk, it wasn't a pretty sight. Well maybe it was pretty, pretty awful.

Once at the alley I had one heck of a time trying to get my fingers in the finger holes of my bowling ball and then when I went to throw the ball either the pins or the alley would move or both. A few times during my approach I ended up flat on my face. Darn shoelaces, all my life I'd had trouble tying em properly. I'm not kidding. I never got the hang of making one loop and putting the lace over or around or whatever. The fastest way was two loops and knot em. The only snag was they didn't stay tied for long. Those do-dads they have now for putting on children's shoes so the laces stay tied would be perfect for me but I'd probably feel a little selfconscious and exceedingly silly with a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, a happy face or Porky pig staring up at me. Needless to say I wasn't exactly a contender for the high single or high triple that night, well actually not any night the way I bowled but even more so that night.

Surprisingly, Mom and Dad never said a word about my condition while we at the alley or later when they drove me home. The next day after classes and feeling like I'd been dragged thru a knothole backwards I went over to their house to apologise.

All Dad said was, "You were supposed to do stuff like that when you were eighteen, a little

late aren't you?". Can I help it if I was always a late bloomer and in this instance, really late?

The next party I hosted at my house. I invited everyone in my course and a few that weren't and all my instructors. College parties are not in the least elaborate. All you need is booze and a place to drink it. The amount of booze consumed is directly related to how successful a party will be. My party was a roaring success and I mean that literally. Ever notice how alcohol affects a person's hearing? Yeah, it's a medical fact. The more liquor a person drinks the greater their hearing impairment until finally they have to yell to be heard. I guess that's why parties are always so noisy. Miraculously, as soon as the effects of the alcohol wear off the hearing loss just disappears although the ears do seem to be a highly sensitive for a few hours after and everyone around the afflicted person is asked to please converse quietly if they must talk at all. Amazing ain't it? Ah the miracles man has wrought with modern medicine, heh heh.

Now I'm not saying my party was a hostesses dream come true, I did have a few anxious moments. One was when a girl who was having a few boy problems chug-a-lugged a bottle of gin. If that's the way someone wants to handle her problems well that's her business but when she spends the entire party locked in the bathroom wrapped around my toilet bowl coughin up her cookies and it's the only toilet in the house then it's my business. I mean here's twenty some odd people and some of them were really odd if you get my drift, drinking some twenty odd cases of beer and numerous other bottles of whatever and eventually these cats gotta go and the litter box is otherwise occupied. Finally after a lot of cajoling, pleading, threatening and begging by my guests I got the girl out of the can and into a car to be driven home and not a moment too soon either, I almost had a mutiny on my hands.

The other problem was the snacks I'd bought for the party. I'd graciously bought potato chips, chip dip, pretzels and cheese sticks for my guests to munch on. I had put them in bowls and had them set out on the kitchen counter prior to passing them around. When I went to the kitchen to get them Min Min, my cat, was head first in the bowl of cheese sticks just piggin right out. Is it my fault cats like junk food? Of course not. I figured he'd probably sampled a little bit of everything from each bowl so I did what any good hostess would do, I kept my mouth shut, put on a big grin and passed the snacks around to my guests. No, I didn't have any, I wanted to make sure my guests had enough, after all that's what being a good hostess is all about, isn't it? I was still smiling about it four hours later when the party was finally over. Funny isn't it, how one little thing can make having a party all worthwhile, heh heh.

When my Dad brought my daughter home the next morning he couldn't believe the mess of my house. There were empty booze and beer bottles covering almost every square inch of floor and table space along with a dozen or so over-flowing ashtrays and countless empty snack bowls. The stereo was playing, "Wasn't That A Party", boy I'll say. It took me hours to get the house cleaned up but it was well worth my time. My peers had accepted me as one of them and besides I made a little over thirty dollars when I returned the empty bottles to the beer store. Not bad eh? When I returned to school on Monday everyone thanked me for the party and wanted to know when I was having another to which I replied non-committaly, "I'm not sure", which actually was a nice way of saying, "Never again, once was definitely enough".

I did run into one situation while I was attending college that I had a hard time figuring out how to handle. A girl I had chummed around with since the first day of school and who had become my best friend made a confession one night after she'd worked up her nerve drinking at a local bar. She told me she was gay, a lesbian. I was dumfounded, I'd never even suspected. After awhile when my power of speech returned I asked her why she'd waited so long to confide

in me after all we had been friends for well over a year. She told me she'd waited to tell me because she didn't want me to think she was interested in me that way. I didn't know whether to be insulted or what. After much soul searching I realized that this girl was still my friend and her sexual preference had nothing to do with our friendship so we continued as before, friends until she moved away and I lost touch with her.

Anyway my school days continued on and on and on. Quite often my days were eighteen hours long what with classes, working, being a mom and studying but I was determined to do well and I can be more determined than the orneryest jackass. In spite of it all I hung right in there so eventually not only was I the first one in my family to attend college I was also the first to graduate college as well. I'm damn proud of my diploma in journalism and it hangs in a place of honour on my living room wall.

Have you ever looked back on something and wonder how the hell you ever did it? Yeah, me too and while your wondering and marvelling at your amazing abilities you might wonder how many years you knocked off your life expectancy by doing what you thought you couldn't possibly do in the first place. Wise words, I think, I seemed to have wondered too far and got lost, heh heh.

It was during this time that I had my first encounter with a somewhat persistent obscene phone caller. The Yahoo would call at least a dozen times a day. He never said anything he'd just breathe heavily into the phone, it's a wonder he didn't hyperventilate. One night while I was attending a meeting he shook my babysitter up so much that when the phone rang yet again it startled her, she jumped up off the chesterfield knocking it over and the leg broke, the chesterfield's not hers. At this point I got really upset. That chesterfield was the best one I ever had as far as looking good. Don't get me wrong, I'm not any more materialistic than the next woman and in most cases a lot less materialistic but there's nothing I hate more than an old piece of furniture with holes in it and the stuffing sticking out, tacky, tacky, tacky. The chesterfield had been my grandmother's, then my sister's and finally mine and now it was broke. That obscene phone caller didn't know it but you mess with my chesterfield and it's game over. Hell hath no fury like a woman protecting her furniture especially when she doesn't have a hope in hell of replacing it.

I had already gone the normal route weeks ago by notifying the phone company of the obscene phone caller. They had instructed me never to talk to him and suggested I have my number changed to an unlisted one which they would be happy to do for a price, naturally. Well I didn't have the price to change my number and I felt my obscene caller should be rewarded for his persistance and I knew just who should present him with his reward, I called the police. The police were a lot more accommodating than the phone company, they put a trace on my phone line to try and catch the Yahoo. The trace didn't work. The Yahoo never called, not once, while the trace was on my phone. As soon as the trace was removed off my phone the calls started again. Now that's spooky.

Drastic measures were called for, well actually I guess desperate measures would be more accurate. Although I had repeatedly been warned by both the police and the phone company not to talk to the Yahoo I had to figure out a way to communicate with him enough to hopefully get rid of him once and for all. Well my plan may not have been the most brilliant one I've ever come up with but I thought it would be simple and hopefully highly effective. Uh huh, I should have thought again.

The next time the Yahoo called I put my daughter's girl guide whistle next to the receiver on the phone and blew as hard and long as I could, when I ran out of breath I hung up. Before I could finish congratulating myself on my brilliance the Yahoo called back and for the first time he spoke to me, he actually spoke. He said, "Thanks for the blow job". I was furious, I mean really FURIOUS. I banged the phone down so hard hanging up on him it's a wonder I didn't break it but thankfully I didn't because I immediately placed yet another call to the police which in turn solved the problem once and for all. The police notified the phone company first thing the next morning that they wanted my phone number changed and since the police were the ones requesting the number change I didn't have to pay for it and the number was changed the very same day. Ah, the voice of authority, amazing ain't it?

CHAPTER SIX: KIDLETS - BLOOD, SMOKE & FEARS

My children are my pride and joy but don't ever tell them that or else they'll take full advantage of it. Yes, I said children, the plural of child. Yeah yeah, I know, where'd the second one come from? Well I'll tell you. My second child is Robert Carl, Robbie or Rob for short. Rob was born in September 1983, the year after I graduated college.

Robbie had a different father than Missy's. Whoa, hold it, I wasn't exactly a loose or fallen woman, I'd been going out exclusively with Robbie's father for over five years before I got pregnant. When I do cotton to a guy which isn't very often I'm committed and the truest blue you could ever imagine. Of course my loyalty never pays off and I usually end up exceedingly blue. You could count the serious relationships I've had on your upper extremities without having to take the socks off of the lower ones. As a matter of fact you could even leave your left mitten on as well.

Robbie's father's name was Rags. Yes, he had a proper name but no-one ever used it. The only thing Missy's and Robbie's fathers had in common besides me that is, was their legendary consumption of a malt brew commonly known as beer. When Missy's father was under the influence so to speak he'd go through two phases, mean and ugly and then real mean and real ugly. He would blow up at anything or anybody without even the slightest provocation and anybody was usually always me. When Robbie's father was under the influence he'd go through four phases, real happy-go-lucky, then amorous, then stupid mode and then finally he'd pass out. When good ole hubby started drinking people would steer well clear of him. When Rags started drinking everyone gathered around him, he was the life of the party.

Rags loved to shoot pool. He could be blind drunk and have to hold on to the edge of the pool table to stay in an upright position but he could shoot better pool drunk than most people could sober. Of course he had to be good, how else do you think he got beer money? It sure wasn't because of a four letter word namely, WORK. I've always been in stupid mode when it comes to my choice of men and I didn't need alcohol to put me there. I did it all by myself. You could say I was naturally stupid but I wouldn't like it much, however, honesty is the best policy or so I've heard.

When I met Rags for the first time I was real impressed. The first time being back when, okay okay, way back when I was a teenager and had quit school and gone to work as a waitress. He had been cruisin the streets of Huntsville with a buddy of his when they met Darlene and Darlene brought them to the restaurant where I worked and introduced us. At the time Rags was playing and singing in a band called, Rags and The Richmen. Boy was I ever impressed. Here was this knock down, drag out, good lookin guy who was really hep and had his own band and he was out with me, little ole me. HOT DAMN. After I got off work the four of us rode around for hours just talkin and hangin out. The second time I saw Rags I wasn't as easily impressed. Of course it was sixteen years later and I'd matured somewhat, heh heh. Anyway as I said I wasn't as impressed but if nothing else Rags was persistent and before I knew it we had a relationship.

After about five years I finally started to see some sense, I know, I know, what took me so long? Apparently the Department of Transportation isn't the only place where idiotry ranneth rampant. I threw the bum out in November 1982. However, on January 1st 1983, Rags came over to the house to wish me a happy new year, uh huh, wishing me happy new year wasn't all he came over for. Okay so the flesh was weak and so was the mind but sex rates right on up there with classic Cadillacs, Corvettes and being the only woman to win the Indy 500. I don't have a classic anything and although driving is my greatest passion, due to circumstances beyond my

control I settled for sex, temporarily. It was a one night stand and oh what a night it was. The next morning Rags and I went our separate ways, him to the nearest bar and me to confession and I'm not even Catholic. Approximately eight and a half months later, (still over-eager), I went to the hospital and gave birth to my son. Rags was still at the bar.

Although Robbie was what they refer to as an "Unplanned Pregnancy", I'd always wanted another child so you might say he was planned. I just left the where, when and why to a higher power, the how I already knew. The Good Lord does indeed provide. I figured I was doing an alright job raising Missy by myself so I thought, "Why not?".

As I said, my children are my pride and joy but I often wondered through the years if I should have raised poodles or kitty cats instead. I'm sure they would've been a lot less trouble. You know back before I had any kids I longed desperately for the patter of little feet but believe me there have been many times since the birth of my children where I wondered if I should have settled for the patter of little paws instead. You know, kids are cute when they're young but once they hit a certain stage they go from cute to cunning.

Raising one child alone hadn't been but I'd never been lacking in gumption and I figured since I was doing pretty good with Missy I'd do just as well with Robbie, uh huh.

Missy and I were very close. She told me everything and she knew she could count on me for anything. We had good times and not so good times as the years passed. Like the time she made butter tarts to get her baking badge from Girl Guides. She'd misread the recipe and put in a cup of salt instead of a teaspoon. Now I honestly tried to get that tart down but my throat just kept rejecting it. I cornered the market on gag and puke that day I'll tell you. Then there was the time she had to go to Girl Guide camp for a week to get her camping badges to complete the requirements for her All Round Cord, Girl Guides highest award. Missy was really worried about having to sleep in a tent.

"What if there's a big storm and the tent blows over?", was how she put it.

I reassured her constantly on the way to drop her off at the campsite, "Don't be silly Honey", I said, "There is no way the Guide leaders would allow that to happen. Your well being and safety are their greatest concern, besides I wouldn't let you go if I thought there was even the slightest chance of a storm blowing your tent over. I promise you, it won't happen."

Uh huh, wouldn't you just know it, the second night of the camping trip there was one heck of a storm and the tent Missy was in collapsed. Murphy's law prevailed yet again. No-one was hurt but a few of the girls caught a cold from the soaking they got. The Guide leader said Missy kept repeating over and over, "Wait till I get hold of my Mother". Yeah right, like the storm was my fault. I went out and did a rain dance or something just to make a liar out of myself. Oh well, all's well that ends well and end well it did, Missy got the coveted All Round Cord.

A few months prior to Rob's birth I got the first hint that Missy was entering what I mistakenly thought was, "THE STAGE", more commonly referred to as adolescence. You know, the stage, when nothing you say or do makes any sense to your child and nothing your child says or does makes any sense to you. Like the day I went over to Missy's school to give her the money to go to McDonald's for lunch. I thought it would be a nice surprise for her and a special treat. Uh huh, the only surprise was for Missy's teacher because I was standing at the classroom door and not in the hospital fighting for my life because of the heart attack I been rushed to the hospital in an ambulance for that morning and mine because I didn't know I'd had a heart attack. It seems Missy had told her teacher all about it when she'd got to school that morning. Once over her initial reaction, Missy's teacher was quite gracious about the whole incident, at least she

stopped looking at me like I'd sprouted dual horns and a tail and even commented on my miraculous recovery and how well I looked. Do you know it's now years later and I still haven't got the foggiest notion why Missy told her teacher I'd had a heart attack. I didn't raise no blabbermouth that's for sure. I wonder if I'll ever find out, probably not. I guess it's just one of those things that will remain one of life's little mysteries, I hate mysteries.

The next indication I had that things weren't that great between Missy and I was shortly before Rob's birth. Missy's teacher found a note Missy had written which shocked hell outta me when the teacher notified me of its contents. The contents of the note led both the teacher and I to believe that Missy might be contemplating suicide. Although I had a few years of the motherhood bit under my belt I realized this definitely wasn't something I had come across while reading books by good ole Doc. Spock or any other child rearing book I'd read either. I needed professional help with this one. Since my divorce I had worked extremely long and hard to become one heck of an independent person but when it came to my child and her well-being my independence would go kaput and I'd take help anywhere, anytime, anyplace.

I contacted the local childrens mental health clinic who upon hearing the contents of Missy's note agreed to do an assessment of her right away. The assessment showed my daughter was badly in need of counselling. I felt lower than low and like a pretty poor excuse for a mother because I hadn't realized there was a serious problem. Just when I thought I couldn't feel any worse I found out a lot of Missy's problems were inadvertantly my fault. I'd thought my job as a mother was to ensure my child was happy, all the time. I still had some residual feelings of guilt over my decision to end my marriage and raise my daughter alone. I felt guilty about depriving my daughter of her father even though I knew she was much better off with me alone, physically and mentally. To put it mildly, I overcompensated and tried to be Supermom. I bent over backwards to keep Missy happy so she wouldn't have any bad feelings. Boy was I good, so good in fact that when she did have bad feelings Missy didn't know how the hell to handle them. That was one good job I did but it wasn't one I would ever want to brag about.

The bad feelings Missy experienced stemmed from her father continually not showing up for prearranged visits. To protect her from the ugly truth, I'd lie and tell her that her dad was working late or was busy when more often than not he was too drunk to show up. I didn't want to bad mouth her Dad to her and I just didn't think she'd understand about him being an alcoholic. I sure as hell didn't understand how a man could put a bottle of beer ahead of his wife, child, job and health so how could she? I never was much of a liar and Missy realized I wasn't telling her the truth. She thought her father didn't show up because he didn't care about her but he did, in his own way. Mind you nothing was more important than the almighty booze but he did care. By trying to protect Missy I did more harm than good. Mine was a sin of omission. It took three years of counselling for both of us to set things back on track.

Now kids can be tenacious when they've got a mind to be and mine are no exception. I guess I'm largely responsible. If I'm right about something and I know I'm right I'll go to any lengths to prove it and I do mean any lengths. As I said before I'm what you might say big on principle. When Missy was eleven years old she was diagnosed as having scoliosis. I know, until it affected me and mine I'd never heard of it either. Scoliosis is a curvature of the spine. In Missy's case it was quite pronounced. She had a 67 degree curve in the middle of her spine and a 23 degree curve at the top of her spine. I naturally did what any good parent would have done in the same circumstances, I took Missy hundreds of miles to see a renowned orthopedic surgeon, a specialist in the field. Now this doctor's research and subsequent discoveries in scoliosis were

nothin short of brilliant however, when it came to dealing with what I guess you could call the humanities of the situation he didn't know diddley squat. The doctor and I did agree the need for immediate surgery was imperative, what we didn't agree on was where and how.

This doctor during the entire course of the consultation stressed the importance of and the dangers of the surgery my daughter needed. The worst scenario was that Missy could be paralyzed from the surgery if it wasn't done by an expert and if the surgery wasn't performed and soon she'd be a cripple because her bones would start to harden as happens to all adolescents only hers would be bent and misshapen. Some scenario. Then this so called miracle man dropped his proverbial bombshell. He told me if I wanted the best for my daughter, (what parent doesn't eh?) and he was the best then before he'd consent to doing the surgery I'd have to make a minimum donation of at least a thousand dollars to his research fund. I was stunned but not for long, my righteous indignation kicked in with a vengeance. I informed Doctor Wonderful that my health insurance covered the medical costs and guaranteed me the best care available for my family and besides I didn't have a thousand dollars. He then informed me I'd just have to make do with an intern doing the surgery and take a chance on whether or not my child would end up being paralyzed. Who the hell did he think he was, God, not bloody likely. The man was about to find out that you never mess with me and mine, NEVER. I left the doctor's office in a huff, a huff that would have made the huffing of the big bad wolf in the Three Little Pigs story look like a whisper of a breeze on a warm summer's day.

As soon as Missy and I returned home I contacted my local newspaper and gave them the low down on the situation. They ran the story and the wire services picked it up as well as national radio and television. You see, I knew my college education would come in handy. Through my journalism course I had learned the power of the press the only thing was I underestimated it just a tad. The response was overwhelming. I received calls from all over Canada and the United States from caring concerned people. I even found a blank envelope in my mailbox containing money. I also filed a complaint against "Dr. God" with the College of Physicians and Surgeons but not before I conducted my own investigation. Although little details aren't my forte you can do anything you really want to and I wanted to, "Hell hath no fury like Donna when she's out for revenge". Dr. God was gonna pay for denying my child the best chance of successful surgery and for making me feel inadequate and guilty because I didn't have enough money.

My investigation revealed one very crucial fact. The money was to be paid before the child was admitted to hospital. The reason for this was simple, it was a teaching hospital and when your child was admitted you had to sign a standard form which stated an interne would do part or all of the surgery on your child. Pretty slick eh? I guess the theory was you'd be so concerned with your child's welfare that you wouldn't be paying much attention when signing all the various admitting forms. Uh huh, little details.

When the hospital contacted me because of all the bad publicity they were getting due to the hullabaloo I was raising they confirmed that the aforementioned form had to be signed upon admittance, no exceptions and there was no way they could guarantee that Dr. God did the surgery himself. The hospital asked me if maybe I had misunderstood the doctor when he told me he'd personally do the surgery if I paid the money. Ironically a few days later Dr. God answered that himself. While being interviewed on a national radio program he stated quite plainly that he did not do the surgery himself. He was around if the interne performing the operation ran into any problems but he did not do the surgery himself. I received countless phone calls from people who had paid the money for Dr. God to personally perform their child's

surgery, they were not happy campers. No-one likes to be taken advantage of and most especially when it concerns their child's health. If nothing else I'd at least raised people's consciousness. Luckily I'd done more. Five people I'd never met called me to offer to pay the thousand dollars for the surgery. Never have I been more moved. Their gestures renewed my faith in my fellow man, it also made me more determined than ever to get the best medical care possible for Missy. It was with much regret that I refused the offers of those wonderful humanitarians. I figured Dr. God cared more about the money than the welfare of his patients and there was no way in hell he was getting anywhere near my child, Dr. God indeed.

I feel I should make a clarification. I've previously admitted that Dr. God's research was nothing short of brilliant. His research made it possible for children suffering from scoliosis to be up out of bed the day following surgery instead of flat on their backs in a body cast in a hospital bed for six long months. My objection to the man was the manner in which he solicited research funds. Intimidation tactics and preying on the vulnerability of parents with sick children may have worked for him but not on me they didn't.

Due to the intense media coverage the chief of surgery at the Shriners Childrens Hospital in Montreal, Quebec, heard about our plight and contacted us via a national radio station. The Shriners are truly one fantastic group of people. Here I was desperately seeking help for Missy and not knowing what to do next and they just solved all my problems in one fell swoop. Missy and I were taken to Montreal, the surgery was performed very successfully by the chief of surgery personally and the care both of us received was unparalled. We were treated like V.I.P.'s. At first I thought it was because of our recent notoriety, however after closer observation I realized all the patients and their families were given the same consideration. Every child was their most important patient. The chief of surgery would come in at night and play games with his patients and if he saw you waiting at a bus stop he'd give you a lift to wherever you were going. I don't know about you but my family doctor never offered me a lift anywhere or done more than examine one of my kids when they've been hospitalized. I could never in a zillion years picture him and Missy kibitzin around while playing Yahtzee.

The Shriners not only arranged everything, transportation, accommodation, meals, etc., they paid for everything as well. They even paid child care expenses for my son who was almost two years old at the time. They even indirectly were involved in solving one of my biggest problems, how to teach my son to pee standing up. Don't laugh, these things do need to be taught and the best way is by example only there were no examples in our house. Obviously I couldn't do it, well I guess I could have tried but the mental picture of me doing so, well you use your own imagination on that one. Ridiculous ain't it? Luckily the family who looked after my son while Missy and I were in Montreal had no shortage of manly examples and by the time we returned home three weeks later the problem was solved. All's well that ends well and it's been nine years since Missy's surgery and although she has had some problems with her back she isn't crippled and can live an almost normal life. As a matter of fact she modelled an almost backless wedding gown on television a couple of months ago and you couldn't even see her scar which runs from her neck to her tushie. Since the surgery my faith in human nature is unwavering. Oh by the way, Dr. God no longer practices medicine in this country. I like to think I'm at least partially responsible for his departure. Like I said, "Don't mess with me and mine".

I won't say Missy was a typical teenager because I have no idea what typical means. What I do know is during Missy's illness and subsequent convalescence which was roughly two years life seemed to be pretty run of the mill, in other words okey dokey. When Missy entered grade

nine at school she also entered into, "The Stage", for real this time. Missy's symptoms included general lethargy, just getting her outta bed was a nightmare let alone getting her to do anything around the house. She suffered from a hearing loss, most of the time she didn't hear a word I said and there must have been some brain damage too because when she did on rare occasion hear me she didn't seem to understand what I was saying. Missy also developed a severe allergy to soap and water. She also suffered some sort of mental disorder, when she spoke which wasn't often the words that would come out of her mouth were unbelievable. For example, one night I made a really nice dinner not that I didn't make nice dinners often you understand but this one was a lot of work. There were cheese potatoes baked to perfection, oh alright they came out of a box but I still had to put them in a casserole dish, add water, milk and butter and I had to stir them all together and put them in the oven and turn the oven on. I also made a nice tossed salad, you know, you take lettuce, celery, onion, tomato and cucumber and toss it all in a bowl. Well I had to chop all the veggies didn't I? I also made mock duck. Why in hell do they call it mock duck? You take a steak, throw some stuffing in the middle of it, roll it up and tie it with a hunk of wool (I never seemed to have any string) and then roast the whole mess. I have eaten real duck, only once though, YUK, anyway mock duck has no similarities to the real thing at all. The airhead who named mock duck must have been a-sittin on his tastebuds in the middle of a swamp when he came up with that one.

Missy loaded her plate. I told her I didn't mind how much she ate but she'd better eat what she took. Missy only ate about half of what she took. Boy that really ticked me off. I told Missy she wasn't going to get anything else to eat until she finished the food on her plate and I told her again the next morning when she left for school. Later in the day I got a phone call from the vice-principal at Missy's high school. In a very cold, cryptic voice he informed me Missy was ill and had nearly passed out. I remember thinking, "Boy, who piddled in his corn flakes this morning"? I told him I couldn't imagine what was wrong as she'd been alright when she'd left for school earlier. The vice- principal then told me in no uncertain terms that he knew exactly what was wrong with my daughter. He said Missy had almost passed out because she was weak from hunger because I hadn't fed her for four days. I don't know which mad me madder, the fact Missy lied or that the vice-principal believed her. I just let loose. I went up one side of that vice-principal and down the other. I told him to tell my daughter to get her sorry ass home and if she passed out from the exertion she could just lay wherever she was and rot. I then informed the vice-principal he'd better make damn sure of his facts before he started accusing someone and if he didn't I'd personally pay him a visit and I was one hell of a lot scarier in person. It's been said when I holler I have a voice that goes right through a person. I don't know if it's true or not but I'll bet Mr. Vice-principal does. At least Missy wasn't as bad as my neighbor's kids. They told everyone their Mom only fed them dog food. She always wondered why people looked at her funny everytime she brought dog food home. They did have a dog, really.

Missy also suffered from severe bouts of stupidity during "THE STAGE". I'd bought her some brand name sportswear, Northern Reflections, it was the in thing. Missy kept complaining the tag on the back of one of her new sweatshirts was scratching her neck. I told her to cut it off.

"But Mom", she said, "No-one will know it's Northern Reflections".

"Missy", I said, "look down". Missy looked down then very sheepishly looked back at me and said, "Oh". There, in two inch high letters across the front of the shirt were the words, Northern Reflections. I'm sure the expression, blonde moment, originated from something Missy said or did.

Another time I left for work before Missy left for school. When I returned home a few hours later the whole house was filled with thick, dense smoke. I took the cat and dog outside, they were okay, thank heavens and I re-entered the house to find the fire. Yeah I know, really dumb but it gets even dumber. I couldn't find the fire. I looked everywhere but wait it gets even dumber. I called the fire department. Over they came, lights flashing and sirens wailing. By the way the fire department was across the street from my house. The pros were on the job and guess what? They couldn't find the fire either. Yep, the city's finest and they didn't have a clue. So much for having any kind of a sense of security. Those bozos spent two hours tearing my house apart and nothing. Finally they left, none the wiser. Personally I don't think they were very bright to start with. They did however tell me I could call them if I figured out where the smoke had come from. I say come from because after all the windows and doors had been opened by the firemen the smoke cleared out and didn't come back. At least if the fire department couldn't find where the smoke had come from they scared the smoke away so I guess they were good for something. While all the windows and doors were open I got chilly so my girlfriend who lived next door sent her husband over to stay with the firemen and I took my pets and went over to her place for a cup of tea and to warm up. It was winter and of all life's little luxuries I value heat above all else. If there were a God of Heat I'd get down and kiss his toasty tootsies.

Anyway upon arrival at my neighbors her dog, who is roughly the size of one of the dustbunnies that accumulates under my bed when I'm not in my Suzy Homemaker mode started barking at my dog who's size resembled a slightly underweight grizzly. My dog ended up on top of my neighbors dining room table shaking with fear. Boy talk about bad table manners, kinda crass that canine. I'd purposely got a big dog for protection, some protection, if a mere dust bunny sized dog could scare my dog that badly imagine what affect a burglar or heaven forbid an over-sized chipmunk would have had. It would be total disaster for the dog not to mention me.

Of course the dogs reputation was all shot to hell not that it wasn't already. The previous summer Ole Wimpo had come across a cat on the patio who was on it's way home with the groceries. It had a big, fat very dead mouse in it's mouth. Ole Wimpo took off chasin the pussy. When the pussy ran up a tree it dropped the mouse. Ole Wimpo picked up the mouse and started running off with it. Well pussy came down outta that tree and started after Ole Wimpo. It was hilarious to see, a mere kitty chasing a dog the size of Ole Wimpo. Like I said, his reputation was in shreds.

Now I don't know about you but there wasn't a hope in hell of me getting anything even remotely resembling a good nights sleep until I found out where the smoke had come from and why. I checked anything and everything. A couple of hours into my search I opened a kitchen drawer to get a screwdriver to take the back off the refrigerator to check the wiring and there it was. Yeah, yeah the screwdriver but also the reason for all the smoke. Inside the drawer was the charred remains of an oven mitt, the inside of the drawer itself was burnt black as well as the inside of the cupboard unit the drawer was housed in.

It turned out that when I had left for work that morning Missy's girlfriend had come over and cooked breakfast for herself and Missy in the oven. When she took whatever out of the oven the oven mitt she was using touched the element in the oven. Here's where it gets even dumbest, Missy's girlfriend then put the oven mitt back in the drawer she took it from. I ask you, how can you not notice a smoldering oven mitt, especially if you happen to be wearing it? All I can say is Murphy must of been occupied elsewhere that day. Luckily when Missy's friend put the mitt

back in the drawer she shut the drawer tight, (Like I said, Murphy must of been otherwise engaged. How often does any teenybopper shut anything?), with the drawer shut tight the mitt only smoldered till the oxygen ran out and then so did the smoldering. I found out later that Missy's friend wasn't allowed near the stove in her home, wonder why eh, and that's why she was cooking at my house. Nice motto, Protect your home, Send your kid out to set fire to someone else's house.

When I called the fire department and informed them of the origin of the smoke they were very apologetic about the whole thing and so they should have been. The one fireman who had been ordering his buddies to tear my house apart looking for the source of the smoke had leaned against that cupboard the whole time he was barking orders. I'd be willing to bet he alone was responsible for the saying, "You can't see the forest for the trees". Thank heavens my content insurance paid for all the smoke damage.

Although motherhood is one heck of a big pain at times there are perks. Like when your child stands there glaring at you after you've tried to explain something to her and all she can say is, "So". You make a snappy comeback with, "No, but I knit a little". Drives her right nuts.

One time when Missy was coming in from school she snuck up behind me and put a handful of snow down the back of my shirt. No it wasn't a perk but it livened me up considerably. I just let it pass but I did reserve the right to retaliation at a later date. That same night Missy went over to her girlfriend's house for awhile, you know, the arsonist, yep that's the one. When she got home she did exactly what she did every night. She went straight up to her bedroom without saying goodnight (she was still in "THE STAGE") and got undressed. She slept in the nude, I think it was some sort of protest against the long flannel granny style nightgowns I wore. She pulled back the covers and hopped into bed without turning any lights on. She then let out an ear-piercing scream so loud it was heard by people a block away, well maybe half a block. Remember I said I reserved the right to retaliate later, later was then and there. Just before Missy came in for her 11:00 p.m. curfew I'd hauled buckets of snow up to her room and put it under the covers on her bed. Victory was mine. Ole Mom had actually put one over on the kid for a change and hot damn it was a good one. Now that's a perk.

It was reminiscent of another time when I'd been big on retaliation. It was just after good ole hubby and I separated and I'd gone to live with my parents. My parents had a boarder and he and I didn't hit it off too well especially since he'd set me fully clothed (not that I would have wanted to get undressed first you understand) in a bird bath full of water. I wanted revenge. At the dinner table a few nights later I did some stupid little thing to him, what I can't remember but whatever it was I knew he was gonna get me back, right then and there. I jumped up from the table and ran into the laundry room which was just off the kitchen and I shut the door. I only had a few seconds before he opened the door to get me and I remember thinking, "He's gonna come through that door and he's gonna kill me", I guess whatever I did to him he didn't consider that little and that stupid. Well when he opened the door he got the surprise of his life. You've heard of trial by fire right, well this was trial by water and the jury, namely me, found him guilty. I'd grabbed the water hose from the washing machine and when he'd opened the door I'd turned the water on full force. Boy did he look stunned not to mention ridiculous with all that water drippin offa him. My retaliation may have been a tad over stated since my mother got showered along with her boarder and it took me over two hours to wipe up all the water but then nothing that worthwhile is ever easy, heh heh. Yupper, fool with the master meet with disaster.

Missy is twenty years old now and I think she's pretty well over "THE STAGE" and she's survived it but more importantly, I survived it. However, maybe the worst is yet to come, Robbie is almost ten. Do boys go through "THE STAGE", Oh God, I hope not.

Missy hadn't entered " THE STAGE " as yet when I got preggers with Robbie or I might have second, third or fourth thoughts. I've never regretted raising two kidlets alone but I will admit it was a tad iffy at times. As I said before I wonder if I shouldn't have just settled for a couple of kittys instead. A nice pair of bobcats probably wouldn't have caused near as many problems as my offspring did. I bet they wouldn't have been fussy eaters either. Just for the record my kidlets being fussy eaters is in no way a reflection on my prowess as a cook. I can cook, just don't ask my children for verification, they're still a little miffed over my classic pork chop casserole. Is it my fault no- stick rice sticks? Of course not. It must have been a bad batch or something.

At one time I even cooked at a roadside restaurant. My boss used to say, "Just get em off the property alive Donna. I don't care if they keel over further on up the highway just as long as they get outta here alive". Of course he was just kiddin around. Well he was. While cooking at the restaurant my boss asked me if I'd bake some pumpkin pies the next day as Thanksgiving was only a few days away. I said I would, no problem, uh huh. Since I'd never made pumpkin anything I stopped off at the grocery store on the way home that night and bought a can of pumpkin so I could practice. When I got home I made some pie pastry, rolled it, put it in a pie plate, opened the can of pumpkin, put it in the pie shell and put it in the oven to bake.

"Boy", I thought, "This is a cinch".

When I took the pie out of the oven forty-five minutes later I sampled a little of the pumpkin filling, YUK, it was awful. What had gone wrong? I figured it must of been a bad batch of pumpkin. When I grabbed the empty pumpkin tin out of the garbage so I could take it back to the grocery store for a refund I noticed it had some directions printed on the label. It seems I had erred. According to the directions you were supposed to mix sugar, eggs, milk and spices with the pumpkin. No problemo, I just scraped the pumpkin out of the pie shell and proceeded to mix it with the aforementioned ingredients. I then put it back into the same pie shell and baked it for another forty-five minutes. My pumpkin pie turned out great. Would I lie? The pie shell was a tad over-done but the pumpkin filling was just fine.

Did you know if the pot goes dry while your boiling eggs the eggs will explode? It's really neat. POOF! just like popcorn. One of my specialties is hamburger hash. You fry hamburger and chopped onions seasoned with garlic, salt and pepper. When it's cooked you add some water and browning gunk and then thicken the whole mess with a mixture of flour and water to make gravy. Did you know if you add too much flour you get a big hamburger pancake? You do, take my word for it.

Raising a boy is a whole different ball game compared to raising a girl. For one thing Missy always outgrew her clothes and they were still in good enough shape to hand down to whoever. Robbie always had either one knee, both knees or the crotch out of any new pants I bought him within a week of first wearing them. Also Robbie was the worst pididler I ever saw. When he soaked his diaper, he SOAKED his diaper. No matter how quick you were when changing his diaper as soon as you got the wet one off and went to put the dry one on he'd let loose, WHOOSH! then he'd look at you with a big grin on his face as if to say, "GOTCHA AGAIN". I swear he did it on purpose. That child was a regular fountain and we ain't talkin of information.

Where Missy was always demure and quiet Robbie was mouth almighty which isn't really a

very good thing if your kind of on the small side for your age. Once when Robbie was a baby I had him out shopping with me. A cashier at one of the stores said, "My isn't he dainty? ". I could've slugged her. Believe me, no mother ever wants to hear her son referred to as dainty. While standing outside on the front lawn with his grandmother one day some teenage boys passing by made some very uncomplimentary remarks. Robbie was about eight years old at the time and he got real riled and yelled at them, "Oh yeah, well come back here and say that". It wasn't just bravado either. If they had of come back Robbie would have taken them all on. He'd have gotten beaten up as they were all twice his size but he would have taken em on anyway. Robbie will defend a person's honour to the death whether they want him to or not. He stands up for what he feels is right and to heck with the consequences. At least he comes by it honestly, he gets it from me, naturally.

Robbie scares hell outta me. Besides not taking any lip from the big guys he always has to climb the highest tree and play the roughest sports. I keep telling him a heart attack at my age could be fatal but does he listen, hell no. One time he came in from outside and asked me if we had any bandaids. Boys are always scraping or nicking some part of their anatomy so if you've got boys you've got bandaids. They go together like peanut butter and jam. I was busy doing my Suzy Homemaker bit so I didn't pay much attention and just hollered to tell him where the bandaids were. A few minutes later I walked into the bathroom, there was blood all over the place and there was Robbie nonchalantly trying to bandage his thumb which incidently had a severed artery. Needless to say we made a quick and I mean exceedingly rapid trip to the hospital for stitches. Throughout the whole thing Robbie was cool and calm, I on the other hand never mind we'll just skip that part, believe me you don't want to know.

When Robert was born I knew that eventually I'd be forced to face my greatest fear, yep SNAKES. Little girls like sugar and spice and all that etc. Little boys like snails. puppy dog tails or whatever, creepy, crawly things to be exact. Snakes seem to know where I'm going to be and purposely show up, uninvited I might add. I guess they like my reaction, it's certainly a sight to behold, how anyone can put up with all that screamin is beyond me. I figured eventually my son would come home with a you-know-what and I had a plan. My plan was quite simple, (by the way that's not a reference to my state of mind) I'd be very calm, cool and collected and just ask Robbie to let the snake go outside as the poor thing was probably missing it's little brother and sister snakes. I was determined not to pass my fear of snakes on to my son, uh huh.

One day after about six heavy duty hours of doing my Suzy Homemaker bit I laid down on the sofa to take a relax. I was sort of nodding off when I heard Robbie come in from outside. I was facing the back of the sofa and I felt Robbie's hand on my back. I rolled over and opened my eyes. You've heard the expression struck dumb or dumfounded, well that wasn't me. There I was, eyeball to eyeball with the grandaddy of the snake who ate San Francisco. Actually the snake was only about a foot long but to me they are all humongous no matter how small they are. What happened next is still a little fuzzy to this day but I hear tell my scream was heard clear over at the other end of town (no wonder I lost my voice for a week) and Robbie's little playmate who was with him only has to see the therapist once a week now and thankfully his hearing loss wasn't permanent. Real cool, calm and collected eh? I found out later the snake hadn't even been alive, like I was gonna listen for a heartbeat before I reacted, yeah right. I didn't care if it was dead or alive, a snake is a snake period. No thanks to me my son has no fear of snakes only his mother's reaction to them. I can say in all certainty he'll never bring a snake anywhere near me

again. Maybe things didn't go quite according to plan but the results were satisfactory, well sort of and that's what counts.

I'm very proud of my son. Despite his small stature he is one of the fastest runners in his school and one of the stars of the track and field team. He is bright and very inquisitive which is a good thing even if it has given me cause for consternation, like the time I took him with me to the hospital to visit my niece, Laura, who had just given birth to her daughter. Driving home the conversation went something like this.

Rob: "Mom, did the baby come out of Laura's stomach?"

Me: "No Rob, the baby came out of Laura's vagina." (I've never been an advocate of the stork or cabbage patch theories)

Rob: "Don't you mean c__t?"

I was so shocked I almost ran the car into a hydro pole. After a lot of stammering and stuttering I asked Rob where on earth he had heard that expression and he said from the kids at school. I explained to Rob why that expression was not suitable and that it was slang and never to be used again. I think by the way I reacted Rob got the message.

Rob shocked me again not too long after by asking me why he wasn't circumcised. I didn't think he'd ever heard the word let alone what it meant so I asked him why he thought he wasn't. His reply, "The guys at school told me". What the hell did they do, stand around and make comparisons? I got worried as Rob seemed to be paying more attention to the sexual education being taught in the washroom at school than in the classroom so I gave him a little speech on the facts of life including the fact he'd better start paying more attention in the classroom and less attention in the washroom. He got the message.

Rob is a very honest sort of kid, well sort of. If he does something wrong he'll tell you, if he has to that is. Not too long ago we moved to a new neighborhood. Since we now lived across one of the citys main thoroughfares from a lake I cautioned Rob when he was going out to play not to cross the busy street and not to go anywhere near the lake unless I accompanied him. A couple of hours later Rob came home and the conversation went like this.

Rob: Mom?

Me: Yes Rob?

Rob: You know how you told me not to cross the street or go near the lake?

Me: Yeah?

Rob: Well I did.

Me: You did what.

Rob: I went across the street and I did go near the lake.

Me: You did huh? Rob, why are you telling me?

Rob: Because a man from the local paper was there and he took my picture and it's going to be in the paper. I thought I should tell you about it before you saw it.

Poor Rob, what a dilemma he'd been in. He didn't want me to find out he'd done what I'd specifically told him not to but he didn't want to pass up the thrill of having his picture in the paper either. Since Rob admitted his disobedience although his motives were certainly suspect for doing so, I took everything into consideration and only grounded him for a week. Grounding is hereditary you know, well it must be, my parents grounded me and I in turn grounded my kidlets so it must be hereditary since its passed down from generation to generation. Either that or its just simply an effective way of dealing with wayward offspring or both. Okay okay, I didn't mean to rattle on, sor-ry. It's just that I realized I'm starting to think and act like my parents did

when I was a kid, oh my God, I'm a mature, responsible adult. How the hell did that happen?

Anyway, Rob was grounded for a week, to start with that is, once I saw his picture in the paper it was a different story. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, well they're right because the lecture I gave Rob was a thousand words easy. His punishment was extended. I grounded him for another week and took his bike privileges away for the same length of time. The picture in the paper showed not only that Rob was near the lake he was actually riding his bike in the lake. Who else eh?

Although my children are not angels I don't think they're all that bad. They don't smoke or do drugs and they don't steal although whenever anything of mine, clothes, jewelry, C.D.'s etc. are missing you can bet your boots it's somewhere in Missy's room. Yeah, my kidlets, I guess I'll keep em, besides I don't have any choice, if I stop making the payments I know for a fact they won't take em back.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE PERILS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Well I'd driven cars and light trucks but as far as I know I've never driven anyone crazy. I'd ridden horses, roller coasters, motorcycles, snowmobiles, bicycles and skateboards but one thing I'd never ridden was the clutch. Talented aren't I? Okay so I've ridden all of the above, I didn't say I was good on all of them, the skateboard and the roller coaster were a little iffy. At least I'm better than my twin. Her husband says she couldn't and I quote, "Drive a greased pecker in a pail of lard". Case and point, once when Sis was driving to work at 5:30 a.m. she got her truck stuck in the snow. There wasn't a whole lot she could do except go to the nearest house which luckily was about sixty feet away and call Daniel her husband. Unluckily the owner of the house was a member of the local constabulary and took exception to being awakened at that particular hour. Daniel wasn't impressed either.

"Why didn't you put the truck in four wheel drive?", he hollered.

"It was", she replied.

I rest my case. Sis it seems also had a problem with numbers, she'd transpose them. She must of as it's the only explanation I can think of for her driving ninety miles per hour through town and thirty miles per hour on the highway.

I remember once when Darlene had first gotten her drivers license as a teenager and had backed the family station wagon down the driveway prior to a family outing. When we all went to pile into the car we discovered the driver's side of the car had been rearranged, as was the lamp post that was halfway down the driveway on the same side. Darlene's reaction could have gone one of two ways, she could have got down on her knees, burst into tears, apologized profusely and begged for forgiveness or she could have played dumb. Doo Doo played dumb. I will admit playing dumb is often your best bet but in this case Dad had parked the car in the driveway the night before with no dents or scrapes and Sis had been the only one to drive the car since. I guess she figured Mom and Dad were gonna believe the lamp post took offense to the car being parked in the driveway and moseyed up along side and gave it a good swat. Oh yeah. Personally I think if she had sucked up royally she wouldn't have been grounded till she had her first born child.

Anyway it was time to broaden my horizons and broaden them I did with an exceedingly long, very wide, really big, bright yellow school bus. There was an advertisement in the local paper. They were looking for school bus drivers and the words, "Willing to train", got my attention so I called the company asking for particulars. Guess what? FIRST YOU HAD TO TAKE A WRITTEN EXAM. Surprise Surprise.

You had to have a B license to drive a school bus and there were five things involved in getting a B license. Number one was what else, the written exam. Number two was a medical examination. Number three was a driver's abstract proving you didn't have any criminal convictions and a good driving record. Number four was the actual driving test and number five was attending a course in defensive driving. You'd think just driving that big, bright yellow bus would be defense enough but apparently not. I mean it wasn't as if someone wouldn't see it, hell how could you miss it? I guess it's possible though. I remember once when I was walking home from work, I'd just gone around a corner when I heard a big crash so I looked back. Someone had actually run into the back of a big tow truck. Later that evening I was telling my Mom and Dad about how some stupid so and so had actually run into the back of a tow truck. It turned out that the stupid so and so was my Dad. OOPS, dadnabit, sorry Dad, I guess it could have happened to anyone, heh heh.

Anyway getting a B license wasn't as complicated as it sounds. I went to my local

Department of Transportation which by then had become the Ministry of Transportation. I wrote the written exam and of course I passed. Then the nice lady there applied for my driver's abstract and gave me the medical form for my doctor to complete. Once my medical was completed I called the school bus company and they arranged for me to begin my training. Now I'm not braggin, well maybe just a little but all my training took was two, thirty minute sessions. The first session consisted of me learning to do a circle check. That's where you check things like tires, muffler, mirrors, brakes, signals, lights, the horn, belts etc. The circle check is vital and is done everyday before you start driving. It's the driver's way of ensuring she is operating a vehicle that's mechanically safe, safe being the operative word especially when your passengers are children.

The second session consisted of driving the big, yellow beast. My years of driving experience really paid off big time. All I really needed was to get used to cornering a tad wider than I was used to because of the length of the bus and using the proper signals when taking on kidlets.

I was ready for my driving test so naturally Murphy's Law kicked in. I woke up the morning of the test with one heck of a cold. I had a fever, every joint in my body was aching, my nose was running a twenty mile marathon, I sneezed with every fifth or sixth breath I took and my eyes watered continually. Yep, I was in fine shape to take a driving test. The weather was as miserable as I felt. There was a regular Noah's Ark type downpour. I drove out to the bus yard. My instructor and I took off in the bus I was using for the test and arrived at the Ministry of Transportation five minutes prior to my eight a.m. examination appointment. While we were waiting in the lobby an examiner walked by. My instructor said, "I hope you don't get that guy. They call him Little Hitler. He never passes anyone on the first try and for some reason he really has it in for our bus company". Uh huh, could fate really be that cruel, you bet your booties it could and was.

Before long Little Hitler and I were walking around in a precipitous holocaust while I did my circle check of the bus. Once I'd deemed my vehicle roadworthy it was on to the roadtest. I drove throughout the city with Little Hitler telling me where to turn and where to stop and simulate taking on a passenger. I was wishing I could reverse the order of things and tell him where to go instead. Here I was, between my watery eyes and sneezing I could barely see where I was going, I was trying to change gears and activate signals while wiping my eyes and blowing my nose and shivering uncontrollably from getting soaked while doing the circle check in the pouring rain. Delightful, just absolutely bloody delightful and all the while figuring the odds of me passing the test were about a zillion to one. Damn Murphy. While wallowing in this pool of abject misery did I lose my sense of humour, hell no. When the examiner told me to stop and simulate taking on a passenger my indefatigable (Reader's Digest again) wit came shining through. I activated the proper signals, came to a full stop, checked to make sure that all traffic had come to a standstill then I opened the door. I smiled and said, "Hello" to my simulated passenger and asked, "How ya doin?", then shut the door. I then looked into my rear view mirror and just sat there with my signals still activated keeping traffic at a standstill. I sat and sat and sat. Finally Little Hitler asked me what I was doing to which I replied, "My passenger is a pre-kindergarten. Wouldn't you know it, she just had to sit at the very back of the bus. You wouldn't want me to take off before she's seated would you? That's against the law." Take it from me, Little Hitler had absolutely no sense of ha ha.

When we got back to the Ministry of Transportation, Little Hitler asked me to put the bus in reverse and back up. Nice try L.H., do I look like I just fell off a turnip truck? My body may

have been taking a real beatin because of my cold but there was nothin wrong with my brain. I had a chest cold not a head cold, heh heh. The foremost rule for a bus driver is NEVER back up your bus without another person standing outside to guide you. Little Hitler kind of glared at me when I asked him if he'd step outside in the rain to guide me.

" Never mind ", was all he said.

When we went into the office I sat with baited breath waiting for L.H.'s decision and hoping against hope that by some small miracle I had actually passed the test. I sat and sat and sat, (Irony ranneth rampant). Finally L.H. said, "You've got some very bad habits you need to work on but you passed".

YIPPEE!!! Murphy must have caught my cold and gone somewhere warm to recuperate. I followed L.H. into another office where he completed the necessary paperwork and arranged for my defensive driving course. In spite of feeling rotten I felt pretty dam good. Maybe L.H. had a sense of humour after all. So far I had gotten my driver's license, my motorcycle license and my B license all on the first try. Nice rut and one heck of a batting average even if I do say so myself.

It didn't take me but a few weeks, albeit memorable weeks to realize driving a school bus wasn't my thing. My route was around my area of the city and my passengers were all kindergarten and prekindergarten kidlets. My own son Robbie was one of my passengers. He thought because his mom was the bus driver he didn't have to follow the rules. I put the kibosh on that thought right quick. There were two really nerve wracking days. The first one was during week one of my brief career as El Bus Driver. I had just let the last little passenger on my list off and was looking forward to going home to some peace and blessed quiet. While I was driving back to the bus yard a little voice asked, "Am I home yet Mrs. Bus Driver?". DAMN, Murphy again. I pulled over and asked the little girl, "Where do you live?".

"In a house", she said.

"Where is your house?", I asked.

"On a street", she replied. This was just ducky.

"Do you know the name of the street where your house is?" I asked.

"I think it's North Bay", she replied.

"No honey", I said, "North Bay is the name of the city you live in".

At this point two other little heads popped up from further back in the bus. It seems the little ones from pre-kindergarten tended to fall asleep on the bus and couldn't be seen by the driver because they were so short and the bus seats were so high. To compound matters my two-way radio wasn't working and none of these kids were on my list. Boy, with the overtime Murphy had made through the years because of me he should have been retired, since he wasn't I figured he needed a crash course on money management and I needed my head examined for even considering a career driving a school bus in the first place.

I decided to take another run around my route just on the off chance one of the kidlets recognized their house. I hit paydirt. Two outta the three spotted where they lived within minutes. I still had the original wayward angel but one of the other sleepers had told me which street Angel lived on. Well Murphy must have really needed the overtime because he was still on the job. Angel couldn't remember which house was hers but she did say it had a swimming pool. I drove up and down that street for twenty minutes looking for a house with a pool in the backyard. Finally after the umpteenth trip I was flagged down by one very upset lady, Angel's mommy.

"Where have you been", she bellowed at me.

I tried to explain what had happened about her daughter's name not being on my list and so on but Mommy was in no mood to hear it. I told her I'd been driving up and down the street looking for a house with a pool in the back yard and I hadn't been able to find it. Angel's mommy replied, "It's an indoor pool". Like ask me if I care Lady. By the next morning I had an updated list, I made sure of it. After that little episode I made all the pre-k's sit at the front of the bus and after my last drop off each night I did a quick trot up and down the aisle of the bus looking for sleeping beauties.

The second nerve wracking day was the day after Halloween. After trick or treating the night before the kidlets were pigging out left and right and front and centre. Talk about a sugar fix. The hyperactivity on my bus was equal to a nuclear meltdown and the noise level was at the point of breaking the sound barrier and this was on the way to school.

My after school run was like a scene from a Stephen King thriller. The noise level was even worse than it had been that morning. It was enough to drive a sane person right outta their ever lovin mind. It's a good job it was me driving. My repeated requests to "PIPE DOWN" were useless. I might just as well have tried rollerskating down a Swiss alp, I'd have probably got further. So I just pulled over to the side of the road, turned off the motor, took a book out of my tote bag and nonchalantly started reading. It took awhile but finally realization started dawning. One holy little terror demanded to know why we were stopped. I calmly informed him, "I can't concentrate on driving this bus safely with all the noise so until everyone is sitting quietly in their seats I'm going to sit here and read my book. But hey no hurry, take your time, this book is pretty good besides I've got all night." After about ten minutes the masses started to realize I wasn't kidding. By the time fifteen minutes had passed you could have heard a pin drop it was so quiet. I slowly put my book away, stood up, faced my passengers and made an announcement. "If I hear any noise whatsoever I will pull the bus over again and this time I won't go until I've finished my book." I then sat down, started the bus and continued my route, in total silence I might add. Not one of the little ambassadors from hell made a sound. I was in total shock, I couldn't believe it had actually worked. I guess the kidlets recognized the voice of authority when they heard it, heh heh.

The main reason I didn't like driving a school bus was the responsibility. I was responsible for fifty some odd children who relied on me to get them to school and back safely. I wasn't the least bit concerned about my ability to do so it was all the idiot drivers on the road that worried me. I knew what I was doing when I was behind the wheel but there were and are one heck of a lot of kumkwats out there who are behind wheels they have no business being behind. They're the ones people always refer to as "THE OTHER GUY". If any one of my little charges had of been injured while under my care no matter if it was my fault or not I could never have forgiven myself.

Since driving a big, yellow bus wasn't my thing I decided to try the same church just a different pew, a big, red and white city transit bus. I was still going to be responsible for the safety of a bus load of people but at least the majority of my passengers would be long past kindergarten age and any that weren't would be with someone that was. Well it made sense to me. Besides the pay was a whole lot better, a whole lot.

I only had my B license for a few weeks when I applied to the City of North Bay to drive for their transit department. "Ignorance is bliss" they say and I reckon they're right. It seems because of the good pay, prestige and job security positions with transit were very much sought

after and there were those people who didn't hesitate in informing me that I didn't have a hope in hades of being hired including the fella I was dating at the time who had been trying to get on with transit for five years. The fact I'd only had my B license a mere month didn't help any either. I don't know if it was my effervescent personality, my charm, my wit or maybe my thirty some odd days of bus driving experience but I got the job. Amazing ain't it? My boyfriend said the only reason I got the job was because I was a woman. Typical male chauvinist pig attitude if you ask me. Some people just can't handle another person's good fortune, it's called envy but that's their hang-up. Like I was going to apologize for getting the job, yeah right.

City transit had their own way of doing things. You had to have a B license to get hired and once hired you had to, now get this, first take a damn written examination. Can you believe it? I had to take the same test I'd written barely a month previously. I also had to take another driving test. I imagine there was a good reason why when you already had a B license that you had to try for it all over again but I'll be darned if I could ever figure out what it was, and people question my sanity? The retesting was done by the city but through the Ministry of Transportation so if you failed the tests you lost your B license. Since I'd put so much time and effort into getting my B license in the first place I made darn sure I didn't lose it in the second place.

Once I'd gone through my initial training with transit I spent the next couple of weeks driving a city bus around the city learning the routes, fares and operational procedures. Now driving a forty-two foot transit coach does take a certain amount of skill and one heck of a lot of nerve. You can't drive one of those babies the same as a car or light truck, hell no. For one thing you have to make wide right turns, real wide or else your gonna leave big, black tire marks along side of something your not supposed to and that's sort of frowned upon by transit authorities, the owner of the nice, white, shiny new car won't be real impressed either. Everybody wants to leave their mark in this world but not that one. The utility company gets a little hyper too if when your going around a corner you brush up against one of their poles. I don't know why, the bus ends up in a lot worse shape than the pole. Neither of these things happened to me but it did happen to drivers I trained with. I just kept thanking God it was them and not me. Besides if I did do something like that do you honestly think I'd be stupid enough to admit it? Of course I would, heh heh.

There were marked differences between driving a school bus and a transit bus. On the plus side transit buses had automatic transmissions, no clutches, no gear changes. School buses had standard transmissions, lots of clutchin and too many gear changes to count. Transit buses were stored in a heated garage so you didn't have to scrape ice off the windshield and it didn't take forever to get heat from the heaters which is of the utmost importance to a skinny little runt like me. I guess until you've had to sit on the hood of a school bus in minus thirty degree temperatures and chip ice off the windshield you can't really appreciate the advantages of a heated garage.

Almost all the transit buses had power or power assisted steering. School buses did not. There were a few of the older transit buses that didn't have power or power assisted steering and more often than not guess who got the one with armstrong steering? Who else eh? Also with the older transit buses if you were doing a highway route in cold weather the cold drafts blowing in from under the doors and windows that didn't shut properly and other places would just about freeze you solid. When it came to a battle between the cold drafts and the bus heaters the cold drafts won every time. I'll give you three guesses as to who always got an old bus and a highway route in extremely cold weather and the first two guesses don't count? Who else eh?

On the minus side you couldn't tell an obnoxious passenger on a transit bus to, "Sit down and shut up", like you could on a school bus, it was against city policy and besides that you'd have probably ended up with a slap in the yap from the passenger. The fact the city buses were equipped with air brakes was eventually a plus but started out as a definite minus. The dunderheaded dweebs in government had passed a law making it mandatory for anyone operating a vehicle equipped with air brakes to have an air brake or more commonly called a Z endorsement on their drivers license. The deadline was a scant two weeks away.

Now some people were lucky enough to automatically get the Z endorsement by being grandfathered in. The grandfather clause meant they had enough previous experience. Would you believe my twenty-three and a half days experience of driving a bus with air brakes wasn't enough to qualify? Nothing ventured, nothing gained and nothing was what I got so I had to take a two day course encompassing the entire working order of an air brake system. I had to learn all the different components, what they did and why they did it. What I didn't learn was why I needed to know all the technical whyfors in the first place? If something went wrong it wasn't as if I was going to personally crawl under the bus and fix it myself, that's what the city paid their mechanics ridiculous amounts of money for. Ironic ain't it? I had to know every minute detail of an air brake system so I could look at a gauge on the dashboard and if the air pressure wasn't up to par pick up the radio handset and call the mechanic, uh huh. More bureaucratic bullpucky. Oh, I forgot to tell you the best part. On completion of the course I had to take, aw you guessed it, a damn written exam which naturally I passed with flying colours. (With flying colours, I've used that expression for years and I don't have a clue what it means. Anyone?). One time when I came back to work after a holiday I discovered the city had purchased five brand fire new top of the line buses and I was actually scheduled to drive one. I was ecstatic, uh huh. Everytime I used the brake pedal the bus would call me a RETARD. It did, a light on the dashboard would come on and light up the word RETARD. Now everytime a driver had any kind of problem with the brake system on her bus she was to notify the city garage immediately so I did. Me: City garage? Garage: City garage, go ahead. Me: Yes city garage this is Hornell. My bus is calling me names. Garage: Say again Hornell. Me: My bus is calling me names. Everytime I put on the 10-14's (you weren't allowed to say brakes on the radio, something to do with not scaring the passengers) the word RETARD lights up on the dashboard.

Garage: Did you not have a training session on the new bus before you drove it? Me: No, why was I supposed to? Garage: 10-4, you were. I'll have someone meet you the next time you come into the terminal and give you a quick run-down. Me: 10-4, thank you city garage.

It seems the new buses were equipped with a retard on the transmission which kicked in everytime you applied the brakes. The reason for this was to save wear and tear on the actual brakes and in the long run money for the city because they were replacing brakes constantly and they weren't cheap. It would have been nice if someone had told me this before I got on the radio and let everyone know what a retard I was.

My co-workers at transit were great, great practical jokers that is. Of course what else would you expect from people who eat at fast food restaurants they call Rotten Ronnie's and Colonel Cluck's or Coroner Cluck's? To get to the transit office cum lunchroom from the terminal you had to cross a public parking lot, go through a coded-entry door and up a long flight of stairs. Everytime you left your bus to run up to the washroom you had to expect the unexpected when you returned to your bus. Quite often your mirrors would be reversed or your destination sign changed or the kneeling position would be activated so that when you reached up through the

driver's side window to pull the switch and open the door of your bus so you could get back in, the bus would drop down suddenly making a loud noise and scare the living daylights out of you not to mention embarrass you all to hell. One time when I was pulling out of the terminal another driver radioed me, when I keyed my handset to reply to him I almost blew myself out of the bus. Some kumkwat had switched my radio and intercom systems around and cranked up the volume, instant headache.

Once in awhile as with all practical jokes one will sort of backfire or have repercussions. One day I was running late but I just couldn't ignore my bulging bladder any longer. By the time I returned to my bus I was even later so I hopped on and took off. My foot would barely touch the gas pedal. Some bozo had hiked my seat up as far as it would go. Instead of losing even more time by pulling over to readjust my seat I sort of half stood and kicked the adjustment lever with my foot. Well the seat came down alright, right on the back of my leg. Hell hath no fury like a woman who's seateth hath hiteth the backeth of her legeth. Now I never meant to retaliate, honestly. Can I help it if fate intervened? Was it my fault a few days later while checking my leg in the lunchroom that the boss happened to see it and asked what the hell happened? The back of my leg from the knee to just above the ankle was very black with deep purple accents. I pointed to the joker responsible and told my boss to ask him what happened. I didn't mean to, it was just sort of a reflex action. Well the joker got a reprimand and I felt terrible about it, I did, really, heh heh.

Transit drivers also have a real problem with the passenger seat located directly behind them. It can't be seen in their mirrors and unless they're equipped with eyes in the back of their heads there's no way they can see it while driving. That seat has been responsible for many a faux pas although not for me personally you understand. One driver after eating a big plateful of home made beans on his supper break needed to put it delicately, pass wind, (Gotcha, you thought I was gonna say fart didn't you?). Thinking there were no passengers left on his bus he let er rip and then said aloud, "Boy that felt good". Just then the bell signalled, a passenger wanted to disembark. I wonder who was more embarrassed? The driver or the poor passenger who had been sitting directly in his line of fire.

Another driver figuring he was alone turned on his intercom and sang rap into the microphone at the top of his voice. He was having a great time for himself until the bell rang. Oh well he'll probably never know if his passenger was a music critic or if the stop was actually where the passenger wanted off.

One driver who was a very nervous individual at anytime drove his bus back to the yard and parked in the garage after his last run at midnight. As he stood up and turned to reach for his jacket hanging from a hook behind him a voice in the dark said, "Is this the last stop?". That poor driver will never come any closer to having a coronary without actually having one than he did that night. After hearing the misadventures of the other drivers over that seat I always made sure to check that seat when I thought the bus was empty not that I would have done anything to embarrass myself, of course not. That's not to say I didn't have more than my fair share of embarrassing moments while working for transit.

One time I drove right through a red light. I don't know why and I didn't realize I'd done it until I was through it. I was so amazed at myself I just blurted out, "I went through a red light". Naturally my passengers sat right up and took notice. Open mouth, insert foot and chew thoroughly. I continued on my merry way, red face and all and after that I kept my big mouth

shut.

Another source of much merriment or embarrassment depending on who was talking to or about who was the two-way radio. Some prime examples of my infamous follies went like this: Me: City yard? Dispatch: City yard, go ahead. Me: Yes this is Hornell, I'm on Springdale and I have a bit of a problem here. Dispatch: What is the nature of your problem Hornell? Me: It's a dog. He's standing in front of my bus and he won't move. Dispatch: Did you try honking the horn or going around him? Me: Yes. Nothing works. He keeps moving around to the side and looking up at me but as soon as I go to move ahead he jumps in front of the bus again. Dispatch: Just go ahead Hornell, he'll get out of the way. Me: Are you sure city yard, I wouldn't want to hit him. Dispatch: Go ahead.

To make a long story short I couldn't go ahead. I was too afraid of hitting Mr. Bow Wow. Anyway after twenty minutes or so another vehicle came along and when Mr. Bow Wow started over to investigate it I took off. Boy I took a lot of flack over that little episode. I wasn't the first bus driver to fall prey to Mr. Bow Wow, it seems he played his little game all the time on unsuspecting drivers. Damn he was good and as far as I know he's still at it. I should point out the enormity of the two-way radio communications. Whatever was said over the radio was heard by all the people riding any city bus at the time so not only were you teased mercilessly by fellow drivers but by passengers too.

Another time while on the Hornell run there were three cows meandering down the road in front of my bus. Me: City yard? Dispatch: City yard, go ahead. Me: City yard this is Hornell, I have a bit of a problem here. Dispatch: What is the problem Hornell? Me: City yard there are three cows going down the road in front of me on Springdale and none of us is getting anywhere fast. Dispatch: Hornell, Did you say cows? Me: 10-4 city yard, cows like in moo. Dispatch: Hornell what are the cows doing? Me: The cows are walking down the road city yard. Maybe they ran out of milk and are going to the store to get some as that's where they seem to be headed. Could you maybe call someone, city yard? Dispatch: 10-4 Hornell, just do the best you can.

I got mooed at for three weeks over that one. I said mooed not mooned. One driver had a different problem on the Hornell run. Driver: City yard? Dispatch: City yard, go ahead. Driver: This is Hornell, the fog is very thick up here and I'm having trouble finding the road in places. Dispatch: Hornell what is your 10-20 (location)? Driver: I'm trying to turn on to Springdale. Here it is, okay city yard, I've got it. Oh my God, I'm in somebody's driveway.

Trying to back a forty-two foot long bus out of an ordinary driveway is downright tricky, add the iron clad rule of never backing a bus up without someone to guide you and top it all off with the dense fog and you've got a driver literally in the soup, a really thick soup, sort of like a pea soup. I know, GROAN. Of course every passenger on every other bus in the city heard what was going on. That driver got a lot of, "Get lost will ya, heh heh" and "Been in a fog lately?". At least they stopped asking me, "How much is that doggie in the window" and where the cows carried their shopping list and singing, "Get along little doggies".

Transit drivers on the whole are a confused lot. You wouldn't believe how many times they forget where they're going or part of a route, especially the spareboard operators, I'm serious. Spareboard means you could be called on to do any route at anytime. Countless times I'd get into the driver's seat and have to look at the destination sign so I'd know where I was going or I'd be doing a route and forget to make a turn. Proper transit procedure dictates that when you do this that you report your error to dispatch, uh huh, only if you've taken proper leave of your senses that is. You'd never live it down, the other drivers wouldn't let you. On the other hand some

drivers were very helpful. If one of them noticed you were going the wrong way he'd tell you to, "Look up". No he wasn't pointing out a U.F.O. he was telling you, "Look at your sign stupid, your going the wrong way". My personal proper procedure was to get back on route A.S.A.P. and hope the hell no- one noticed and most of the time it worked. Sometimes it didn't. One time while doing the Pinewood run I got noticed so I figured I'd better follow procedure and notify dispatch. Me: City yard? Dispatch: City yard, go ahead. Me: City yard this is Pinewood. I'm a tad off route but will be back on route shortly. Dispatch: Pinewood, is there any particular reason why your off route?

Now at this point I could have made up some elaborately ridiculous excuse but what the hey, why bother, honestly is the best policy and besides I couldn't think of a good excuse not that anyone would have believed it anyway. Me: There sure is city yard, I forgot where I was going, heh heh. Somedays you just couldn't win.

Once I missed part of my route and arrived back at the terminal fifteen minutes early which was considered the eighth deadly sin. It didn't take long for the other drivers to get on their radios. I was asked questions like, "Was I licensed to fly?", or "Did I check the front of my bus for re-entry burns?" and "Did I forget I was supposed to stop and pick up passengers?". Yep, my co-workers were a real hoot.

Occasionally a driver would forget about all the passengers on the other buses who could hear his radio transmissions. One driver radioed another driver and asked him, "What's the difference between an Italian woman and an elephant?" The other driver said, "I don't know."

"The Italian woman is the one in the black dress", was the answer.

The transit switchboard light up like fireworks on the fourth of July. It's hard to believe there were that many Italian women wearing black dresses on the buses at the same time. Obviously they took the whole thing personally. There were a few reprimands handed out that day.

I was doing the Highway 11 North run one night which includes the psychiatric hospital. Yeah yeah, I know, I was taking a real chance doing that route, once there they might not have let me go again, heh heh. While on the hospital grounds my headlights shone on a whole herd of bunnies frolickin in the snow. So entranced was I by them that I just had to tell someone. I radioed another driver who would be doing the next North Highway run and told him to be on the lookout for the bunnies. Me: Hey when you get up here watch for the bunnies, are they ever cute. Driver: Yeah 10-4, you know they're really good eating this time of year. I was being a little bit of a smart ass and I replied, "You'd eat Thumper?"

"Why not, you ate Bambi a couple of weeks ago.", was his answer.

Me and my big mouth. I'd forgotten I'd told that particular driver about eating venison at my parents house. You got it, open mouth, insert both feet and chew thoroughly. Now all the passengers on all the buses would think I'd killed Bambi. The first time I worked for transit I only worked for a couple of months and then they discovered they had too many drivers. Since I was the last one hired I was the first to go. For a year and a half I pestered the personnel department to get hired back on. Finally they were hiring again and I applied. I waited and waited to hear from them and nothing. Finally I called the transit manager and asked what was going on. He informed me that they were going to hire the new drivers from out of town, I wasn't even in the running. He also said I hadn't had a very good record for attendance when I'd worked there previously, NOT. I hadn't missed a day or been late even once and I'd had an excellent driving record. Fool, was he in for it. I was going to get hired back on make no mistake about it.

I called the mayor. I very nicely explained the whole situation. I told him that as a taxpayer I was aghast at the city hiring people from out of town when the city's unemployment rate was so high and there were people living here that were already trained to do the job and do it well, namely me. I also told him what his so-called transit manager had said about my work record and suggested he have said manager check his facts before putting his foot in his mouth after all he was a representative of our fair city. I finished my little speech with, "Maybe the local paper would be interested in hearing my little story."

Within an hour I got a call from the transit manager. His first words were, " You've been making some phone calls."

He then requested that I come in the next day for an interview and informed me he would be checking my work record beforehand. The next day I showed up right on time for my interview. The first thing the transit manager said was, "I've looked over your employment record with us and I can't find anything wrong with it".

Surprise, surprise. The urge to gloat and say, "I told you so", was overwhelming but I didn't, after all I do have some couth. The squeaky wheel gets the grease or in this case the job. I was rehired.

I stayed with transit for two years, then I had to change my lifestyle. The stress not only from the job but from the worry and guilt I felt about not being at home for Robbie and Missy got to me and something had to give, unfortunately it was my health. Being a good mother is the most important job for me hands down so I quit my job. I am much happier being at home for my kidlets although I do miss the commodarie of the people I worked with, they were a great bunch, right bananas they were.

CHAPTER EIGHT: VACATION 1 - WOE IS ME

My idea for getting away from it all would be just driving, getting in a car and going anywhere. No set destination, no itinerary, no restrictions, no responsibilities, just the open road and me. I'd like to travel throughout the United States and Canada and discover for my self whatever there is to discover.

Since this is my fantasy I'd like a few perks included. I'd want to be doing my discovering in a blue 63 corvette. I'd also like all my favorite music to sing along with on the C.D. player and if Dwight Yoakam or Aaron Tippin were in the passenger seat to sing harmony well I guess that would be a bit of okay too. It would be kind of nice as well to have unlimited funds just to cover expenses although I want it understood I'm definitely not an expensive person. Yes, enough money to cover necessities such as gas, mine from all the junk food I'd eat and for the fuel tank in the Vette too. Oil, 10 W 30 for the Vette and orange juice for me after all a girl needs her vitamin C. Seat covers, high back bucket in sheepskin for the Vette and a 28 inch waist and 32 inch leg in denim for me. Footwear is of the utmost importance as well, let's see, D-78-15's or equivalents for the Vette and I think Dingo Inlay boots size eight in black and red for me.

Packing wouldn't present much of a problem, I travel light. A couple pair of jeans, a few shirts, clean underwear in case of an accident, an accident with the car that is, I haven't wet my woollies since I was two years old, a lined denim jacket just in case, in case I haven't got something warm and furry to cuddle up to and I don't mean Smokey the Bear. A long denim skirt would do for dressy occasions, it would match any of the shirts and look great with my boots. A little bag with toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, lipstick, eye shadow and mascara, a towel and hairbrush and I'd be all set. It would all fit into a little overnight bag. The main reason I travel light is I'm not exactly what's referred to as a " Fashion Plate ". I like the way I look in a pair of jeans, a shirt and boots. Now some people take wearin jeans very seriously, I don't but my cousin does. Her jeans have to be just so. She will go out and buy an expensive pair of jeans then she takes get care in givin them that well worn appearance, she shoots em. No kiddin, she lays them on the ground (hangin them up doesn't work as well) and shoots em with hers father's old shotgun. I on the other hand give my jeans that old, worn look the natural way, I wear em till they practically fall apart because I can't afford to buy a new pair but what the heck, they're comfortable, they make me feel good and they suit me, after all that's what it's all about, me being me. Besides I don't have a shotgun.

You'll notice I didn't mention one essential item for most women, a bra. For me a bra is not exactly an essential, to start with your supposed to fill the cups and I ain't referring to coffee and my cup definitely doesn't runneth over. As a matter of fact I'm a card carrying, past president of the Itty Bitty Titty Committee. The only time my lack of womanly attributes bothered me was when I was a newlywed and people used to refer to my husband and I as Smiley and the young lad. My lack of bosoms or hooters as they are usually referred to by the male gender does mean that when I run or dance or am engaged in the "S" word the only thing bouncing is my hair.

Yes, the ideal getaway, Tennessee, Texas, New Mexico, Alabama, Arkansas, Alberta, Colorado, P.E.I., and a whole lot more. It sure is a nice dream but then in reality stranger things have happened especially to yours truly so I'll just hang in there. I'm the sort of person who if the opportunity presents itself I grab it and hang on nice and tight and if there's no opportunity then I make one, like a trip I took a few years back.

Many of my friends managed to leave their cares, worries and kids behind sometime during the year and get away from it all for a few days. This left me quite envious needless to say for as

everyone knows for me to go anywhere without my offspring parallels trying to take the broomstick from the wicked witch of the east in mid flight. However, miracles do happen and yours truly did indeedy get away from it all, although I'm not sure if getting away from it all comes anywhere close to describing my trip. Out of the frying pan and into the fire seems more appropriate for some reason.

Anyway, continuing on, my little jaunt started normal enough, normal for me that is. Have you ever tidied the house, packed for two kids, lined up baby sitters, shipped the kids out, packed for yourself without a foggiest notion of where you were going or what you would be doing, taken care of finances, recruited someone to care for the cat and made yourself presentable all in the space of 45 minutes? Only someone extremely well organized or incredibly stupid would even attempt it. I'm not just sure under which category I fit and I don't think I want to know.

The two companions I was travelling with, Roch and Ron were something else, yes indeed, something else. Roch was the twinkle toes of the dancing dodo set. The way that man moved on a dance floor left me speechless which in itself is hard to imagine. Off a dance floor he was hard working, dependable, personable and occasionally good-humored. He was a man of few words and the few words throughout the trip were, "I'm hungry" and "Pass me a beer". Roch was alright, a good man to know if you had a death wish and were too cowardly to commit suicide. I had it from a reliable source that the Mafia had their eye on that lad.

My other companion is a little harder to describe because he was pretty special to me at the time and I will admit to a small degree of prejudice but I will try to be unbiased. Ron was the strong silent type. He was every girls dream, a cross between Errol Flynn, Bogey and Bozo the Clown. One minute he was a straight-laced, no-nonsense sort of a guy and the next minute he's a blathering idiot with his hat sideways on his head, staggering around, arms flapping doing a God awful imitation of an insane partridge. Like I said, every girls dream.

Anyway, back on track. We left the city and headed up the north highway with Cobalt as our destination. Cobalt was a little mining town located approximately a hundred and some odd miles north of North Bay where I lived. The ride was quite pleasant with music included. For some reason which I couldn't figure out the speed at which the tape deck played corresponded to the speed of the truck in which we were travelling. You haven't lived until you've heard Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton singing, "Islands In The Stream" at 80 m.p.h.. It sounded like The Chipmunks after a couple of 24's of Labatts Blue.

Upon arrival in Cobalt, I discovered much to my delight, that we would be roughing it in a bus converted to a camper. I conjured up all kinds of images of Ron and I and how things were going to be for the next three days and most especially the nights. Well conjured up images and reality are two entirely different things. I first started to realize this when it was time to answer nature's call and I don't mean the call of the wild although when I found out where I had to answer the call I was pretty wild. Would you believe out behind the bus? I kid you not.

Now the male of the species don't know just how well equipped they are for this kind of situation. All they have to do is stand there, unzip their pants, whip it out and let 'er rip, very simple and uncomplicated. It also allows for a certain measure of privacy. Not so for the female of the species, oh no. Now there's nothing stopping a woman from piddling while standing up but she'd better be under the shower or up to her dignity in water when she does so. Since this method leaves a lot to be desired let's get realistic. A female must first bare her tush to the elements, then execute the first half of a deep knee bend, in other words squat, with her feet placed firmly apart. In this endeavour, position is everything. Unless you have the proper slant

on the situation you could end up with soggy pants or dribble in your boots. Due to the strategic location of the neighbors etc., the only possible place to answer the call was right outside the back door of the bus. Now that left me with two main concerns, the first being if anyone opened the door of the bus I'd get it right in the head, the second being if anything or anybody came up behind me while I was in shall we say a vulnerable position I'd have a major coronary. Either way I'd have been caught literally with my pants down and that brings us to the problem of control. When answering nature's call you must have some semblance of control, after all this is not something you can walk away from and leave running. I'm happy to say that luckily I got thru that bit of reality and without losing too much dignity.

Next came sleeping arrangements. The camper had two single bunks, one on either side. I foolishly envisioned Ron and I all cuddly and cozily nestled together in the sleeping bag, it seemed oh so romantic. Well reality reared it's ugly head again. There was no way in God's green earth that two people could cuddle cozily in a sleeping bag meant for one person. Just breathing was complicated enough. Movement of any kind could well have caused serious structural damage to any part of my anatomy. Now I know how a condemned man feels in the gas chamber, thank heavens neither one of us had any ammunition.

Any idea of foolin around was entirely out of the question. I mean honestly, could you have gotten frisky with a bedmate who was wearing two pair of socks, three shirts and two pair of pants? Even if a person could have overcome the aforementioned problems of lack of space and overabundance of clothing the very real possibility of hypothermia would have deterred even the mightiest of men. Roch sleeping in the next bed didn't do a heck of a lot towards promoting romantic thoughts either. If you've ever heard a bull moose in mating season then you'll have a fair idea of what Roch sounded like in slumber. Come to think of it, Ron sleeping was the perfect foil for Roch, he sounded like the cow moose answering back. How lucky could one girl get?

The next day was spent with the three of us touring Cobalt. We went up hill, over dale, down hill and thru swamps with a side trip or two to bushy acres. Sightseeing with two mining men is something else again. We left no stone unturned, literally. That evening we sat around in the camper reminiscing about the good ole days when there was heat. We even managed to survive the night despite the sleeping arrangements.

The following morning found us headed further north to what I suspected was the real love of Ron's life, Boston Creek and Silver Bar Mine. Now getting from where we'd parked the truck to the actual mine site took a few basic tracking skills. Trying to follow Ron thru the bush was a lesson in survival in itself. Even if a person could have kept up with him you'd have run the risk of serious bodily harm from rebounding tree limbs. Since I couldn't or wouldn't keep up with Ron I'd resorted to my tracking skills which were practically non-existent and got me exactly nowhere. I finally tried the only other possibility left, I followed the trail of orangey-red ribbons some kind soul had tied to the bushes, (they must of known I was coming) and lo and behold if I didn't end up at, you guessed it, the mine site. Would wonders ever cease?

A few minutes later, Twinkle Toes came trottin up the trail staggering under the weight of a huge monstrosity of a machine called a gas plugger or something. For those not in the know, this particular piece of mining paraphernalia is used to bore holes in rock into which dynamite is placed for blasting. I said rock not Roch although by the time the trip was over I'd wished I'd meant Roch. Anyway the three of us were soon busily engaged in doing our respective jobs. Ron and Roch took turns making a horrible racket with the gas thing-a-ma-jiggy, cursing it,

raising a dust cloud that would put a sand storm in the Sahara Desert to shame and just generally creating one heck of a ruckus. I, on the other hand went about my job with my usual quiet dignity and grace. I mean let's face it, not everyone can position themselves seductively atop a rock pile and lay there looking absolutely adorable all day. It was a tough job but someone had to do it. Ron, bless his little heart, took pity on me later that afternoon and let me take the truck all by my little self into Kirkland Lake for supplies. He was sooo happy at being able to give me a rest from my strenuous labour that I didn't have the heart to tell him that the last time I had depended on my keen sense of direction I'd ended up 22 miles in the opposite direction of where I was originally headed in the first place. The fact I actually made it to Kirkland and back with no trouble of any kind is a sure bet for, Ripley's Believe It Or Not.

Finally towards the days end it was time to blast. As soon as Ron and Roch started putting the dynamite into the holes I, being the brave and adventurous sort got as far away as possible. It did occur to me at that point to request of Ron that I be given the keys to the truck just in case, (in case they got blown up I'd at least have a way home) but my good breeding prevented me from doing anything that tacky. Thanks to Ron's excellent skills the blast went off fine while we hid out under an overhang of rock and played peek-a-boo with the trees. After the blast we headed back to Cobalt to spend the night. Upon consumption of a few beers I was more than ready to retire to our SNUG, LITTLE sleeping bag.

The next morning we headed north again to spend the last day of our trip back at Boston Creek. Actually it almost turned out to be my last day anywhere. The first hint I got of something being amiss was upon arrival at the mine site. I learned I was expected to help Roch muck out the hole we'd blasted the day before. Muck out is a miner's professional way of saying, "Clean up the mess we made yesterday so we can make another one today". It didn't take me long to realize the outfit I was wearing wasn't quite right for the occasion. A suit of armour would have been perfect but as luck would have it I'd left mine at the tinsmiths for repairs. It was at that point that I learned two very important lessons. Number one was never and I do mean NEVER stand in front of Roch when he is mucking out a hole. Number two was if you forgot number one make darn sure your life insurance is paid up to date. As I stated earlier, Roch was a definite candidate for a mob hit man. If the boulder he dropped on your right foot didn't do you in then the rock smashing into your left kneecap immediately after would. It took steely determination on my part but I did manage to get thru the rest of the day, well almost . The words, A fool never learns, would have been most appropriate about then.

It was while Roch and I were mucking out the new hole we'd blasted out earlier that Roch made his third and final attempt to cause bodily harm to my person. I, being the kind, considerate person I am offered to help Twinkle Toes move a particularly large chunk of rock. I thought my offer would show him that I was a sensitive, forgiving individual who didn't hold a grudge. That had to be the stupidest most asinine thing I'd ever done in my life. Roch and I started lifting and this twit who was the epitome of gracefulness on the dance floor had the audacity to actually stumble causing him to lose his grip which in turn left me in sole possession of the gigantic boulder. With a noble effort I managed to keep the situation under control for all of two seconds and then I was forced to witness the declension of the calcareous concretion, which in layman's terms means, I DROPPED THE DAMN ROCK. I came thru the ordeal fairly well, suffering no more than a scraped finger and several broken fingernails. Not so for Roch, not only had he been outsmarted and out manoeuvred by a mere female, he'd blown any chance at all of impressing the powers that be at Mafia headquarters. Poor Twinkle Toes had such a

woebegone expression on his face I almost felt sorry for him. I said almost, even a person possessing my superior and outstanding qualities had their limit.

Now, you'd think with everything that had happened and with Roch accepting his dismal defeat that the remainder of the trip would have been smooth sailing for me, right? Uh uh, think again. It was when we left the mine site and headed for the truck to return home that Mr. Strong and Silent gave doing me in a shot. That's right, Ron, the man of my dreams actually turned out to be one of my worst nightmares. Was there no justice in the world? Obviously not. Anyway, continuing on, remember the old saying, "Fool with the master and meet with disaster", well I wish I had, remembered that is. We started off for the truck each of us carrying a share of the load. Ron led, naturally, carrying a pick, a shovel and various lengths of steel rod used in conjunction with the gas thing-a ma-jiggy. I followed my master tottin a gas can, a cardboard box and a bag of tools. Last and certainly least as far as I was concerned came Stumble Bunny previously known as Twinkle Toes plodding along under the weight of the gas thingy. What happened next was to some degree my own fault. Never being particularly subservient I failed to stay the required ten feet behind my master. Ron had stopped to adjust his load and I being ever so helpful gave him a hand. It was as he was turning to continue up the trail that one of the steel rods he was carrying made direct and I might add excruciatingly painful contact with the left side of my head. Now a blow of this calibre could well have felled a lesser woman but I stalwartly stood my ground. How I ever managed it was beyond my comprehension but nonetheless I did. Now I realized accidents did happen, they happened to my foot, my knee, my hands and lastly my head. I honestly and I might add foolishly believed what happened to my head had been an accident until I saw Ron's reaction to the incident. He was walking up the trail and for an instant I thought maybe he hadn't realized he'd hit me but then I noticed his entire backside was shaking. I was incredulous. This man, the man of my dreams, my hero, was laughing. He was laughing so hard he could barely walk straight. Here I could have been suffering from major trauma to my cranium and the fool was giving himself a hernia from laughing so hard.

Now I know it's hard to believe but I didn't say a word. I good-naturedly endured Ron's chuckles and snorts and Roch's enormous grins (it's a wonder his face didn't crack) over the whole episode all the way back to North Bay and home. I didn't even lose my temper later when upon entering the shower I slipped and did serious although repairable damage to my left shin. Don't ask me how I know but I do know that either Roch or Ron is responsible for that as well. Even Murphy would know when to quit but not Roch and Ron.

Not long after that memorable journey Ron and I ceased to be an item. I figured he was even more hazardous to my health than smoking. The fact I found out he had a wife and kidlets that he forgot to mention also played a big part in my decision. If I ever get the chance to get away sans offspring again I think I'll try bungy jumping or skydiving, it would in all likelihood be much safer.

Oh by the way, what goes around comes around, Ron was charged by the police for giving false information about his mine and received three months in jail and a $20,000 fine. Awful, ain't it? It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy eh?

A couple of summers ago I managed a few days away with the kidlets. I was still working for transit and had bought my first car. I say first car because it was the first car I'd ever bought myself. It was a bright red, 86 Toyota wagon and it was mine, all mine. I saw it in a car lot on one of my bus routes and I fell in love. I called the car lot to get the important details, like did it have a cassette deck and how much did it cost? Oh I know mechanical details are important too.

I did ask if it had a block heater. Before long that little Toyotie was sittin in my driveway. For some reason that car just seemed to fit. The car did have a lot of mileage on it and my insurance rate was high, really high. It seemed because I'd never actually owned a car myself I was considered a new driver. Can you beat that? My twenty-five years of exceptional driving experience meant didley squat. Canadian car insurance leaves a lot to be desired, a whole lot. Luckily after six months of driving for city transit with no accidents or tickets I was able to get my insurance rate cut in half, I was now experienced, I'll say.

The day we left for our little trip I had to work. I was doing the early Redbridge run. By early I mean I was up long before Mr. Sun, way before, like four a.m. before. I'm a morning person but that was pushing it. I had to work until one p.m. and then I was off work for a whole glorious week. Just to give you an idea how precious time off was, there were times with transit that I'd work thirty-five or more days straight without a day off. Those times didn't exactly turn my crank but what the heck someone had to do it. Who else eh?

When I got off work I rushed home, changed clothes, grabbed my overnight bag and a supply of country and western cassettes, jumped into my car and took off. Five minutes later I came back and got the kids, I always forget something. I'm kidding, heh heh. I wasn't exactly in a holiday mood mainly because I'd gotten the phone bill the day before. I don't know about you but a phone bill totaling $526.00 for one month sure as hell shakes me up. Missy's boyfriend had moved clear across the country to British Columbia, need I say more? Sure I had a job that paid well but by the time I paid the rent, utilities, babysitters for Robbie and groceries etc., there was very little if any left over out of my paycheck. It took me a long time to save enough money for the trip. The practical side of me kept saying I should just stay home and use the money to pay the phone bill, yeah right. My not so practical side said, "To hell with poverty, let's go" so naturally off we went. I never was very good at arguing with myself, I always lose.

Our destination was my sister April's house. She lived in southern Ontario about three and a half hours away by car. We had an uneventful trip with the tape deck blaring and my little Toyotie did me proud. She ran beautifully for an old girl. I hope when I've got as much mileage on me that I'm running just as beautifully.

The next morning found us following April and her family down the highway to Niagara Falls, Ontario to visit Marineland. April drove an old Camaro, nice car. It had wide silver tape in various places on the front of it. The tape held the headlight pot in place or something. Personally I think it held the front of the car together, period. The back of her car had a sign across it that said, "Beyond Bitch" which I guess was self-explanatory. She also had personalized license plates, A.J. Whip. A.J. stood for April Jane and Whip was Dad's nickname for her. Dad always called April Whip or Whipper but I don't know why or if I did I forgot. I also had personalized plates, Mine said, 1 Coker. You wouldn't believe the times I've been pulled over by Johnny Law because of my plates. I have to keep explaining that Coker is really my name and no I don't snort coke and even if I did I'm not stupid or brave enough to flaunt it on my license plates. One guy in town has plates that say, Reefer, I wonder if he gets hassled as much as me? Maybe I should have gotten Donayo instead, Dad's nickname for me. No. I don't know where he got that one either.

Marineland was EXPENSIVE. The charge for admission would have covered a fifth of the phone bill. The food in the restaurant was under cooked and over priced and it rained. How's that for a memorable day? Oh there were a few highlights. Robbie wanted to go on the rollercoaster. I didn't want him to. He'd never been on an adult ride and I certainly wasn't going

to let him go by himself. After much begging and whining which had no effect on Robbie whatsoever I finally agreed to accompany him on the ride. Now that sucker was one scary lookin ride. It had two loops which meant the passengers were turned completely upsidedown not once but twice at some ungodly rate of speed. It was definitely not for the faint hearted. What was I doing there? You wouldn't believe some of the things us mothers will go through for our youngins. You know there's a lot to be said for motherhood but that sure as hell wasn't covered in any of the manuals I'd ever read.

Robbie and I were securely strapped into the car or what ever they call it. Then we started going very slowly up the incline. On the way up the hill I kept giving Robbie instructions, "If you get scared just close your eyes, hang on tight and count or tell yourself a joke, anything to keep your mind off the ride until it's over." I was so afraid he'd be terrified and there wouldn't be anything I could do. We were committed (and I don't mean to a state hospital but we should have been for being on the thing in the first place) there was no stopping now. How I get myself into these situations is beyond me.

When we got to the top of the incline I prepared myself for the worst. I just knew Robbie was gonna be hysterical with fear and I was gonna have an impossible time tryin to keep him from goin right out of his ever lovin mind. As we literally blasted off down the track I shut my eyes and started screaming and I do mean screaming. I was absolutely terrified. I remember thinking, "If Robbie has any trouble I can't help him, he's gonna die and I can't do a thing." I was pushing my feet down so hard I pushed my big toe clear thru the top of my right running shoe. I kept praying, "Oh God, please let it be over." Then I heard Robbie yelling, "Yahoo, Cowabunga." The kid wasn't screaming in terror, he loved the ride. Finally the damn ride was over. I have no idea what it was like going upside down thru the two loops, I didn't know when we were in them because I never opened my eyes, not once and I'd been so scared all I remembered was my fear. I couldn't even let go of the safety bar and stand up to disembark when the ride was over until Robbie asked me if I was gonna stay on and go again, that got me movin. I'll never go on a roller coaster again, never, Never, NEVER.

Since my legs were so shaky we all decided to sit down in the outdoor theatre and aquarium and watch the marine show, you know, where all the big fishies perform like Shamu I think his name was, he's a killer whale or something. Since the show was just about to start April figured we'd have trouble finding a seat but for once luck was with us and we all got seats right down at the front where we could see the show up close. Uh huh, it wasn't luck at all, it was Murphy, yet again. The first time that real big fishie jumped up outta the water and dove back in belly flop style we got hit by a wave of water that nearly knocked us off of our seats. How nice, here I paid a small fortune to get into a place to eat under- cooked, over-priced food, be scared outta my wits and then soaked to the skin. I figured it couldn't get any worse but then again what did I know? When we left to go back home I discovered I'd left my car headlights on and the battery was dead. Thank heavens there was a guy nearby who had booster cables as not surprisingly neither April or I did. Anyway, Missy elected to ride home with April and April's daughter who is around Robbie's age decided to ride with Robbie and I. The plan was I would follow April so I wouldn't get lost. Uh huh, I lost April even before we got out of Niagara Falls. I drove around for awhile looking for April, I couldn't find her so I took off for her place. I actually did pretty good, I didn't get lost once until I got close to Toronto and then I made up for it. I realized I didn't know which cut-off to take. All the while I'd been looking hoping to catch sight of April but to no avail. Later I found out that she'd somehow ended up behind me instead of in front and

she'd pulled over and had a sleep. Nice April, real nice, here I am lost, it's past midnight, I'm dead tired and to top it all off I've got your kid not that she was much trouble. Her and Robbie had fallen asleep even before I left Marineland and asleep they stayed. I pulled into a gas station to ask directions but it was a useless endeavour. The fella working there was East Indian and when I asked for directions he said, "I am very pleased to serve you. How much please?" When I asked him if he spoke english he said, "I am very pleased to serve you. How much please?". I then asked him if there was a telephone I could use? He said, "I am very pleased to serve you. How much please?". Like I said useless. Finally I asked him, "Are you a horse's ass suckin wind?" To which he replied, "I am very pleased to serve you. How much please?". When I went to get back into my car the fella came running after me. He said, "You very pretty lady, please I come with you, yes?" Yeah right Sabu or whatever, take the proverbial hike. Imagine the nerve of the bozo. As luck would have it, my luck that is, I went to four other gas stations and at every one of them the attendant said, "I am very pleased to serve you. How much please?" I was beginning to think I was trapped in a horror flick, "The East Indian Syndrome". When I stopped at the sixth station I hit paydirt. Oh there was the resident Sabu in attendance but there was also a customer who spoke english and even had a map of the city. I was so relieved I almost offered to pay for his gas, I said almost, there was still the howfor I was gonna pay the phone bill when I got home in the back of my mind. Within half an hour I was pulling in at my sister's house. April wasn't home yet but my folks were there to let me in as they'd arrived earlier in the day for a visit. They were a tad concerned at me losing April en route but it sure wasn't as if I'd done it on purpose, besides at least she knew the way home. Sure enough April pulled in about an hour later.

Now I don't usually make a fool of myself two days running but if your a mother then it's kind of compulsory. The next day April and I took our kidlets to another theme park called Wonderland. With what it cost me to get in there I could have made one heck of a dent in my debt to Ma Bell and what really got me was I had coupons good for a discount on the admission price and the cost still almost blew me away. The food was over-priced, naturally but at least it was cooked. You'd think I'd have smartened up and packed a lunch. We stuck to kiddy rides except for the little matter of the water slide which was no little matter. I begged and whined but again Robbie paid no notice so in line we stood, for an hour and a half. I don't like heights, they make me nervous but for the sake of motherhood everywhere I dutifully climbed flight upon flight of stairs just so I could do something I didn't want to do in the first place. As Robbie and I were getting into the little raft to ride down the slide in he turned to me and asked real concerned like,

" Mom, are you going to scream again?" I told him to ask me when we got down to the bottom. When we got down to the bottom he didn't have to ask but I don't think I screamed near as loud as I did the day before on the roller coaster. No wonder my throat was sore and I kept losing my voice. This motherhood bit sure takes a lot out of a body.

The next day finances dictated it was time to head er home so there endeth the vacation. By the way, I had to give Ma Bell seventy-five dollars every payday until the phone bill was paid. They said the only reason they were letting me pay like that was because I'd always paid my bill on time before and was a good customer. Missy got while the gettin was good. The day after our vacation she moved out west to join her boyfriend which was just as well and in all likelihood saved me from literally rippin off her dialing finger and sending it to her boyfriend with my sincerest regards. Kids are such a joy at times but that wasn't one of them.

CHAPTER NINE: VACATION II - THE WOE CONTINUES

I don't know about other people but when my parents go on vacation it's the slapstick comedy of the year. This year my parents offered to let my nine year old son Robbie and myself accompany them on their annual getaway. Since vacation money in my house is not usually present in any large amount, oh what the heck, it's never been present in any amount at all, I gratefully accepted my parents very generous offer.

Now good ole Webster defines a vacation as "freedom from regular duties and engagements", to me that translates into no bed making, no dishes to wash, no meals to cook, in other words no housework period. (HOT DAMN, now that's what I call really livin.). Well it was that alright, but I sure as heck don't have a clue what else it was. Webster has another definition which goes, "adverse or unfortunate event" under the heading disaster which comes pretty close to describing the sequence of events as they unfolded for me. My parents got off a little easier, where they thought of the trip as a mite disorderly, Webster's definition would undoubtably be chaotic.

I have travelled places with my parents on numerous occasions and it's always the same. Like the time we travelled to Buffalo, New York, for my Uncle Cecil and Aunt Sadie's fiftieth wedding anniversary. My parents had just returned from a vacation in Buffalo and were making the trip back down to surprise my aunt and uncle so it wasn't as if they didn't know the way. I happened to mention that I would like to see Niagara Falls as I hadn't seen them for years and they are an awesome sight. So Mom and Dad being the kind considerate people they are took a route which would allow me to see the falls in all their majestic fury, four times. Yep, four times.

I saw the falls the first time and then we continued on our merry way until we came to a toll booth. Dad paid the toll and then drove on at which point Mom told Dad to take the next turn to the right. Mom was what you'd call the co-pilot cum navigator. Dad took the required right turn as per Mom's instructions and I got to see the falls for the second time. In no time at all we came upon believe it or not the same toll booth we'd been at a few minutes earlier. Well we all had a good laugh about it then Dad paid the toll for the second time and we were off again at which point Mom told Dad to take the next turn to the right which of course Dad did and I got to see the falls for the third time. Before we knew it we were right back at the same toll booth as the first and second time. You know I've always wondered about the expression, "going around in circles", now I know exactly what it means and who they were taking about.

Dad paid the toll for the third time and we drove off once more on our not as merry way. I want it understood that I was only a passenger in the car. Being the passenger in the car meant I had no say-so in the operational procedure at all. My job was to just sit there so I can't be held responsible for what happened next. Mom told Dad to take the next turn to the right. Can you believe it? But wait it gets worse, yeah you got it, Dad took the next turn to the right and guess what, right again, I got to see the falls for the fourth time and then you know what, yep right you are, we came upon the same toll bridge as the first, second and third times. At this point the man in the toll booth just shook his head and waved us through, he didn't even make us pay the toll. I'm happy to say we did finally manage to get off of our self- imposed merry-go-round but it wasn't any thanks to Mom, heck no, would you believe she actually told Dad to take the next turn to the right? Now good ole Dad who has always been able to make Mom see the error of her ways, heh heh, and very nicely I might add told Mom in no uncertain terms what she could do

and where he was going in words I'd be too embarrassed to write. Suffice it to say he told her she could have sex and then take off because he was going left and left he went. Atta boy Dad.

We had left our home in North Bay around two a.m. on a Saturday morning and we'd made pretty good time travelling considering our little sight-seeing hiatus at Niagara Falls. We finally pulled into our motel around nine a.m. Boy were we tired but not too tired, not too tired to shop that is. I mean let's face it, we were in the good ole U.S. of A. The prices were cheaper than in Canada, a whole lot cheaper and of course the selection you had to choose from was vast and varied. The amount of goods you could bring back across the border duty free then was a heck of a lot more than it is today. Besides it was for my Mother that they coined the phrases, "Shop till you drop", and "Born to shop". Don't get me wrong I like to shop as well as any woman it's just not high on my list of priorities and lack of funding is a definite deterrent. So shopping we went.

Don't ever let anyone tell you that shopping isn't hard work because it is. Shopping is as rigorous a physical workout as spending a day at a gym pumping iron or whatever it is you do at one of those places and even more so if there happens to be a sale on. You try moving a three hundred and fifty pound mountain that's wearing a black dress and sporting a moustache outta your way and that's just so you can get close enough to actually see what's on sale. It ain't easy especially if your total body weight even soaking wet is under the hundred pound mark. It's a good idea to have a piece of the rock while out shopping just in case you have to move a whole darn mountain. You could try to talk your way around the moustache sporting mountain by yelling, "Oh my God, SNAKE", but it's been done to death, the death of the person who originally thought up the idea in the first place when she was crushed by the masses making a very disorganized and riotous exit.

Shopping takes dedication, determination and cunning. Dedication like in standing in line outside a store when the temperature is twenty-nine degrees below zero from five a.m. until nine a.m. so you can be one of the first fifty people to enter the store upon opening and receive a five dollar gift certificate which you can use towards any purchases you might happen to make once you actually get into the store to see what's on sale.

Determination as in once the store opens making your poor frozen body respond to the commands of your brain and making your legs move so you can walk into the store you've been waiting four hours to enter. Determination as in getting through the solid mass of bargain hunters who are in a highly excited almost frenzied state. You have to push harder, elbow sharper and tromp on feet with all the finesse of a bull elephant on the charge. See I told you shopping was really physical.

Lastly you have to be cunning. Cunning as in knowing exactly when the mustachioed mountain is gonna relax her grip on the training brassiere she's holding so you can just sort of bump into her, grab said bra and lose yourself amid the masses before she can realize what's happened. Why said mountain would even have been looking at a black 28AA cup is beyond me. Maybe it was the colour that got her and she wanted to be colour co-ordinated with her black dress although she must have been going to use it for a set of fancy ear muffs or something or maybe she was planning on going on some super duper diet because she had to be at the very least a 52D cup. Some people will buy anything just because it's on sale. Now me I didn't care about the colour, the size was perfect and the price was right. The fact I hadn't worn a bra in twenty years had absolutely no bearing on the matter what-so-ever.

While standing in line to pay for my bra I spied a sale table of winter boots so I gave up my place in line albeit grudgingly and hot-footed it on over. After a major workout pushing,

elbowing and stomping I finally got close enough to espy a pair of black boots in my size. I decided to risk life and limb and try them on right there and then figuring if I went someplace less crowded by the time I fought my way back to the sale table all the good bargains would be gone. I deftly slipped off the boots I was wearing and just as I went to try the first boot on it happened. I was broadsided by a mountain in a black dress and sporting a moustache. Yep, the one and the same I'd snaffooed the bra from. Before I knew it she'd picked up my boots I'd just taken off and was heading for the cashier's desk faster than a speeding bullet with MY BOOTS. Ain't it amazing how people that big can move that fast? Now these weren't just any boots. These were calf high, deerskin moccasins. They were hand beaded with fur trim around the top and fur pom poms at the end of each drawstring. Just to give you an idea of how much those boots meant to me, one time while on a train with my mother the cook from the dining car offered me a hundred dollars for those boots. Considering I'd bought them off of my twin sister, Darlene for ten bucks it was one heck of a deal but I just couldn't part with them.

I dropped the boots I was trying on but not the bra after all the bra was a sure fit and took off after the mountain as fast as my scrawny little legs could go yelling, "Those are my boots, give me back my boots, they're mine", to which no-one paid the slightest attention. By the time I got to the cashier's desk the mountain's purchases were being rung up and the mountain was telling the cashier the price for MY BOOTS was ten dollars. I literally grabbed the cashier and yelled, "Those are my boots. I wore them in here. You can't sell my boots, they're mine". It took me awhile but I finally managed to convince the cashier that she couldn't sell my boots. I think the hole in the sole was what really got my point across as well as the horde of irate shoppers waiting not very patiently in line to pay for their purchases.

I donned my beloved boots and got the heck outta there. While I was standing outside the store taking deep breaths of fresh and I might add very cold air the mountain walked by me wearing a smug little smirk which sort of puzzled me considering what we'd just gone through. "Boy she's really a good sport", I thought, then it dawned on me. I didn't have the bra. I'd set it down on the cashier's desk while arguing over my boots and I'd been so thankful to get my boots back and get outta there I'd forgotten all about the bra. Irony ranneth rampant. See I told you, you have to be cunning. I'd been outsmarted. Oh well I never wear a bra anyway, black or otherwise. By the way, keep you eyes open for a mountain wearing a black dress, sporting a moustache, a smug little grin and funny looking black ear muffs.

Now where was I? Typical woman eh, I got side tracked talking about shopping, oh yeah, we finished shopping around four p.m. Mom, Dad and I headed on over to Mom's cousins house where we'd been invited to dinner. Mom's cousins, Howie, Silly, (short for Priscilla) and their two children Skip and his sister who's name I can't remember (Don't you just hate it when that happens?) made us very welcome in their home. Their home was nice and well cared for yet still had that homey, lived in look that makes a house a home. The first hour and a half we were there was spent with Mom and Silly catching up on all the family goings on after all it wasn't very often Mom got to see her U.S. relatives and as children they had been quite close.

While Mom and Silly were talking I just sort of sat there looking around trying not to look too bored. Leslie, that was Skip's sister's name, I knew it would come to me eventually. While I was sitting there looking around I noticed a beautiful figurine of a persian cat on top of a wooden chest. It was absolutely the most gorgeous thing I'd ever seen. It was so life-like it was uncanny. I'd never seen anything so finely detailed. I wanted to ask Silly where she'd got it but I didn't want to be rude and interrupt the conversation which I might add was going non-stop so I just

kept looking at it and bided my time. Eventually Mom and Silly started to wind down and just as I was gonna ask Silly about the figurine she got up off her seat and headed for the kitchen to see about dinner. The figurine stood up, stretched and then proceeded to follow Silly out to the kitchen. No wonder the damn thing looked so real. Boy would I have felt like an idiot if I'd got the chance to ask Silly about it earlier. Thank heavens for good manners.

Silly talked with a native New York accent which was very pronounced and her o's came out sounding like a's. Dad was teasing her about something and when she said, "Bab you stap that", I just cracked up. You know how people say if your around someone for any length of time you start emulating them? Well I don't know how long any length of time is but by the time we left Howie and Silly's home around ten p.m. Mom, Dad and I were all starting to sound really Silly, heh heh.

After we left Howie and Silly's we stopped at a restaurant to have a snack and then headed back to the motel for some much needed sleep, remember we'd been up since two a.m.. Mom and I were in the bathroom changing into our p.j.'s when there was a knock on the motel room door. We couldn't figure out who on earth would be visiting us at that time of night especially since the only ones who knew we were even there were Howie and Silly and we'd just left there. Dad left the chain on the door and asked who it was and who it was, was another cousin of Mom's that she hadn't seen in fifteen years, Mary Ann. Apparently Howie and Silly had told Mary Ann where Mom was staying. Mary Ann and her husband came into our room and after all the hugs and kisses and what have you in the line of greetings Mary Ann pulled out a bottle and wanted to party. Thanks a lot Howie and Silly, who wanted to sleep anyway? Us, that's who. Mary Ann informed us that the manager of the motel told her that if we made any noise that he was gonna kick us the heck outta there. Mary Ann thought that was really funny, no wonder, it wasn't her suffering from sleep deprivation. The only thing she was going to be suffering from was one heck of a hangover the next morning. After about an hour Dad finally convinced Mary Ann and her husband that we really did need to get some sleep and they left. I don't even think our heads touched our pillows before we were do-dooz.

We were up early the next morning as the party for my Mom's Aunt Sadie And Uncle Cecil started at ten a.m. Mom's Aunt and Uncle were surprised and pleased that we'd come all that way to help them celebrate their fifty years of marriage. Boy talk about hangin in there. Everyone was dressed to the nines whatever in hell that means. If it means anything to do with of on a scale of 1 to 10 then I was definitely a 10. Oh alright, 9 3/4 but the fact my nose is a 1/4 inch off from the centre of my face and there is a little bump on it shouldn't count, well it shouldn't, it wasn't my fault. Remember, I told you earlier about the foul ball smuckin me right between the eyes when I was a kid. So you see I really shouldn't be held responsible for the misshapeness of my nose and the fact I wasn't supposed to be where I was when I was has no bearing on the matter whatsoever. Now where was I? Oh yeah, everyone was dressed to the nines.

All the ladies were attired in long gowns and long gowns are my thing. A long flannel nightgown to a long denim skirt to a long cotton dress, it's my thing. You see originally I'd bought a long, pink, yucky polyester thing to wear but I wasn't real impressed with it. Then one day I spied the dress I was meant to wear. It was made of cotton which meant it would be comfortable against my soft, delicate skin and not scratchy. The colour was reminiscent of splendour in the grass. Oh for heaven's sake I was trying to be creative. The colour was a mixture of all the colours of autumn leaves. Are you happy now? Good. The colour suited my

heavenly hazel eyes and my tresses of chestnut brown with highlights of red and gold. Okay so I'm pouring it on a bit thick. Haven't you ever heard of literary license? The dress had a square neckline with little lapels which showed off my long, graceful neck. It had long sleeves with ruffles at the wrists. The long sleeves covered up my scrawny little arms and the ruffles drew attention to my small yet nicely shaped hands. It had an elasticised bodice which didn't do a thing for my practically non-existent bustline until I donned a padded bra then Voila, BOOBIES.

Speaking of boobies, not my lack thereof but Darlene's lack thereof, remember, Darlene is my identical twin sister. When we were teenagers we used to host parties all the time. You know, twist parties, jive parties, shimmy parties, we loved to dance so I guess you could say we were teenyboppers. I know GROAN. Anyway at this one party we hosted Darlene wore the prettiest blue dress, MINE. The reason she was wearing the dress instead of me was extortion. I kid you not. You see I'd done something I didn't want Mom and Dad to find out about but Darlene knew. Get the picture? Uh huh, I thought you would. So here we were partying hardy with Darlene looking like a million bucks in MY dress and I was madder n' hell. To top it all off, Alfie, the red haired hunk I had a crush on was totally smitten with Darlene. Of course the falsies Darlene was wearing under MY dress was what got his attention. Falsies, you know, the foam rubber do-dads you put in your bra, instant breasts. Well why not theys got instant everything else. I got really depressed when a slow song started playing and Alfie and Darlene on the dimly lit dance floor were stuck together tighter than when my bubble gum met up with my hair. My depression was short lived. When the song ended I turned up the lights, after a few seconds Alfie realized everyone was staring at him and Darlene so he released his vice like grip on her and took a couple of steps backwards and that's when things started poppin. Darlene's things that is. Alfie had been holding Darlene so tight that her foam rubber do-dads had been squished flat. When he'd backed away they'd popped back into shape with a loud audible POP! For a minute there was a stunned silence and then the twenty or more people at the party just cracked up. There was a God! What the Lord's forgotten fill with cotton Darlene not foam rubber. Darlene and Alfie were so embarrassed. Ever see a red head go red? We're talkin bright fire engine red here. Things couldn't have worked out any better than if I'd planned it myself. Mess with the master, namely me and meet with disaster. I'm a firm believer in the adage, "Everyone gets what's coming to them eventually", eh Darlene?

Back to my dress. The skirt was tiered with little ruffles at the bottom of each tier and was floor length. The skirt's effect was twofold. It made me look like I actually had hips and the length concealed my incredibly long but puny legs. The part about the dress that really turned my crank was the fact it was half the price of the pink thing even including the cost of the instant bosom thingy. Like I said the dress was perfect. It was the kind of dress that makes a woman want to strut her stuff even if her stuff was store bought.

We left the anniversary celebration around 2. p.m. and headed for home as it was a fair piece to travel. The trip home was almost uneventful, I said almost. When we crossed the border from the U.S. to Canada, Canadian law under the Highway Traffic Safety Act kicked in and Murphy's Law kicked in right along with it. There was a road sign on the side of the highway that said something to the effect that if we didn't buckle up we'd be payin up. Being a law biding citizen, heh heh, I naturally buckled up my seat belt. A few miles down the road Mom who was sitting in the front passenger seat asked me to pass her the maple walnut fudge she'd stashed somewhere up on the back window ledge. Not being a contortionist I had to unbuckle my seatbelt so I could turn around and search for the sweets. Guess what? I couldn't move. Uh huh, you got it, my

seat belt buckle was jammed tighter than seventy- three goldfish in a pint size mason jar. Hence Mom wasn't about to have her maple walnut fudge unless Dad pulled the car over and unjammed my seatbelt which had as much likelihood of happening as Aaron Tippin and Dwight Yoakam fighting a duel over yours truly. I've dreamed of that you know. Oh I don't mean a duel physically, heck no I mean a duel of words after all they're both great song writers. Just imagination that, Aaron and Dwight standing face to face with me where else but right smack dab in the middle. What Aaron would say to Dwight would go something like, "AIN'T THAT A HELL OF A NOTE. I'M UP AGAINST YOU but YOU'VE GOT TO STAND FOR SOMETHING and I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY." Then Aaron would turn to me and say, "LET'S TALK ABOUT YOU. I PROMISED YOU THE WORLD and NOTHIN IN THE WORLD is going to stop me from giving it to you. IF I HAD IT TO DO OVER, I wouldn't be such a HONKY TONK SUPERMAN. I'd forget the CALL OF THE WILD because right now there's A WHOLE LOTTA LOVE ON THE LINE and I don't want to WONDER HOW FAR IT IS OVER YOU or hear THE SOUND OF YOUR GOODBYE."

Then Dwight would say to Aaron, "Here on the STREETS OF BAKERSFIELD, I GOT YOU right where I want you. Your a DANGEROUS MAN. Your tryin to BURY ME but THIS TIME it won't work. Your up to WHAT I DON'T KNOW but you can just put your HOME FOR SALE, get in your LONG WHITE CADILLAC and header to SIN CITY just SOUTH OF CINCINNATI."

Then Dwight would look deep into my eyes and say, "PLEASE, PLEASE BABY, YOUR THE ONE LET'S WORK TOGETHER. IF THERE WAS A WAY to show you how much I love your LITTLE WAYS and that THE HEART THAT YOU OWN is mine I would. Since I STARTED DRINKIN AGAIN, IT ONLY HURTS WHEN I CRY. I AIN'T THAT LONELY YET but if leave me THIS DRINKIN WILL KILL ME, I'LL BE GONE."

What, like I'm loco because I dream in song titles? Yeah right, can I help it if besides being bright beautiful and brainy I'm unique as well? If you got it flaunt it and if you don't, lie like hell and never send a picture.

Now where was I again, oh yeah, dear ole Dad's aversion to using his ABS (anti-locking brake system). Heaven help me if we got into an accident and I had to get outta the car in a hurry if it caught fire or landed in a lake or something equally as drastic because I'd have been up the proverbial creek. A lot of good wearing clean underwear in case of an accident would do me then. You see my Dad is one of those people who when travelling goes from point A to point B with no stops in between. I on the other hand at least stop long enough to get something to go. Ever try eating a doozy burger while driving? Two all beef patties, double bacon, double cheese and real gooey sauce on top. I usually end up wearing at least one beef patty, one bacon, one cheese and most of the sauce. Maybe good ole Dad is onto something?

Finally, after a lot of verbal abuse and a divorce threat from Mom, Dad relented and pulled off the highway into a town so we could get something to eat. Mom and Dad got out of the car and started across the street to the restaurant. I was a little slow on the uptake but when they were almost at the entrance to the restaurant I started wailin like a wounded whatever. Dad came back to the car with a smug little smirk on his face and attempted to unjam my seat belt. The way Dad was going at my seatbelt with his pocket knife would look like he was stabbing me to anyone walking by and somebody was walking by, two of the town's finest. Just jokingly I yelled rape, boy what a todo that little four letter word caused. You know some people just can't take a joke and the two police officers were a perfect example. After a hurried explanation on my part and

one heck of a lecture on their part the local constabulary continued on their way and Dad finally got me out of my seatbelt and I got to go to the restaurant for something to eat, red face and all.

Anyway the preceding is a prime example of what sort of things happen when travelling with my parents and I had no reason to believe things were going to be any different this time and I wasn't disappointed.

Our trip was planned for the first part, that is to say we did some planning before the trip and also planned the first three days of the trip. Well you know what they say about the best laid plans, they go astray, uh huh, ours went God knows where and never did make it back. Now my folks are super. They were supplying most of the trip's necessities, in other words they were paying all transportation expenses plus the cost of accommodations. All I had to supply was clothing for my son and I and money for shopping and meals. Simple eh? Uh uh, the appearance of any extra money in my household after the monthly bills are paid is parallel to the aforementioned duel actually becoming a reality. Luckily my face was my fortune. Well it was. You see a couple of months before our planned trip I tried this super duper face cream that promised to reduce the signs of aging. It was supposed to accomplish this amazing miracle by smoothing out all the little lines and wrinkles caused from the years of anxiety of raising two children. Well it did that alright, my face and neck was so swollen from an allergic reaction I had to the cream there wasn't a wrinkle left to be found. When I contacted the manufacturer of the cream and told them about my allergic reaction to their non-allergenic cream they decided to pay up to shut me up to the tune of a thousand dollars, VOILA, vacation money. Now all I had left to worry about was suitable attire.

We were attending the wedding of a girlfriend of my sister's in a city that bordered the U.S.A. My Dad was to give the bride away and the theme for the wedding was western. You know ride em cowboy and git along little doggie sort of stuff. The wedding invitations had been wanted posters which I thought was a novel idea. Actually I was looking forward to the wedding because I had a great pair of cowboy boots complete with conch straps, a long tiered and ruffled denim skirt and a white shirt with fringe I'd been dying to wear. My son, Robbie wasn't as enthusiastic. He didn't mind the cowboy boots or the jeans I bought him to wear but he sure raised a ruckus over the shirt. Now as shirts go it was quite ordinary. It was a plain, blue button down shirt. Robbie however had never worn a shirt in all of his nine years of life. I know it's hard to believe and we won't go into the whys and wherefores of why a boy nine years of age hadn't ever worn a real, honest to goodness shirt because quite simply it just never came up before. All he'd ever worn were sweatshirts and he was adamant he wasn't wearing anything else. After much pleading and cajoling on my part which had no effect whatsoever, I finally laid down the law and told him he was, "wearing the shirt or else, or else he wasn't going", which was an empty threat as there was no way I could go without taking him too but luckily he didn't know that. WHEW, good ole Mom finally won a round, but I didn't get too cocky, there were still hurdles to get over and I'm a lousy hurdler.

Just before we left on our vacation Mom who has suffered with back problems for years was a dumb dodo and cut the grass which was not something she should have been doing. Her back went out or whatever it was her back did when she did stuff she wasn't supposed to did which meant we had to make allowances for Mom's stupidity. First off we could only travel for thirty to forty minutes at a time and then Mom had to get out of the car and walk around so she wouldn't

stiffen up which nearly drove good ole from point A to point B with no stopping in between Dad right round the bend metaphorically speaking of course.

We made more pit stops between North Bay and Cornwall than Al Unser Jr. has in his entire racing career. On one pit stop at a roadside park Robbie had to answer the call of nature so off he went to the biffy. When Robbie returned he was shaking his head and muttering about the disgraceful shape the bathroom was in. He said someone had stolen the seat so he'd had to position himself over a hole in the toilet which looked more like a bench than a toilet and he hadn't found the handle to flush so someone must of stolen that as well which was disgusting because you could look right down the hole and see all the pooh and pee. Obviously Robbie was not impressed by his first encounter with ye ole outhouse. Mom, Dad and I just cracked up.

After what seemed like days but was actually only hours we arrived at our destination. We checked into our motel which by the way was very nice and headed for the dining room for lunch. After lunch we went to a mall which luck would have it just happened to be right across the road from the motel to do some shopping. Actually luck had nothing to do with it, I made the motel reservations. Need I say more? After shopping we took a little ride across the border to the U.S. Now I don't know what Robbie was expecting when we crossed the border but whatever it was he was sure disappointed. I guess he thought that since the U.S. was a different country than Canada that it would look noticeably different. I'd tried to tell him beforehand that there were differences but often they were quite subtle and not easily recognizable but as usual he figured since it was me talking what did I know? I mean everyone knows Moms aren't really with it and you certainly don't take anything they say seriously at least not if your between the ages of seven and nineteen. Why that would be breaking the kid's code of honour or something and every kid knows that you only break the code in extreme circumstances such as when your hungry, need a ride somewhere or the most dire circumstance of all, you need money.

My sister April and her tribe were meeting us in Cornwall but by the time we returned from our little sightseeing tour they hadn't arrived yet so we left a message for them at the front desk as to our whereabouts and proceeded to mosey on over across the road to a restaurant for dinner. Before entering the restaurant I noticed a ground hog leaning up against the side of the restaurant somewhat similar to the horse leaning up against the side of the saloon in the movie Cat Ballou. I mean the way the ground hog was leaning was similar not that the ground hog had any similarity to the horse, not even I can't stretch literary license that far. The fact the ground hog was even there in the first place did however give me some cause for concern. I mean what's a ground hog supposedly a critter of the wild doing at a restaurant in the middle of the city in the first place? Either the restaurant was exceptionally well known for it's fine cuisine and the ground hog heard about it and being tired of his nuts and berries bit decided to give it a try or else vice versa. The vice versa being that restaurant was well known for the amount of garbage it had because people found the food to be unpalatable and the ground hog decided to raid the garbage dumpster. Since I couldn't tell with any amount of certainty if the ground hog had actually been inside the restaurant I guess the answer will remain one of life's mysteries. Maybe I should have just asked? "Yoo hoo, Mr. Groundhog, excuse me Groundy ole boy but is the food any good?". My opinion would be no use as I'm no judge of food. If it's hot, has salt and pepper on it and I didn't have to cook it then as far as I'm concerned it's fine.

About halfway through our meal April and her tribe showed up, the tribe being her man Finn, her son Kory and her daughter Alicia. Naturally we all had to move to a bigger table so we could all sit together which resulted in mass confusion as plates of food, purses, sweaters, people,

teacups and teapots and glasses of water were transferred over under and around other patrons halfway across the restaurant to the bigger table. Now all this hubbub is quite normal for my family however our waitress didn't consider it normal and she stalwartly stood her ground and told us we couldn't do that which did her no good whatsoever and finally she admitted defeat and just let us have our own way. The family that stays together eats together, heh heh.

After dinner we returned to the motel while April and her gang checked in and then we all went to visit the happy couple who were to be married. Once there we all sat around shootin the bull and then it was decided that we would all trot on down to the waterfront and watch the fireworks. Oh did I forget to mention it was the first of July, Canada's birthday you know. Anyway off we went to the waterfront. When we reached the waterfront we realized we had at the very least a half hour wait before the fireworks would begin and if we wanted to sit down while waiting it would have to be our tushees meetin up with Mother Earth, in other words we'd have to sit on the ground. We'd forgotten about Mom and her back and there was no way Mom could sit on the ground. I mean we might of got her down alright but we sure as heck wouldn't have got her up again. What goes up might come down but what goes down stays put.

While standing there pondering the situation and not purposely looking stupid I spied a booth the Air Force something or other had set up to sell hot dogs and hamburgers to the masses gathered for the occasion. The people working at the booth had a couple of chairs behind the booth which I guess they were intending to use during slack times. However from where I was standing it didn't look like anyone was or would be cuttin em any slack at all. I trotted right on over to the booth with more nerve than the infamous Dick Tracy, explained to the people in the booth the problem with my Mother and enquired if I might borrow one of their chairs until the conclusion of the fireworks or at the very least rent one. Being the silver-tongued devil I was and the people in the booth being the good samaritans they were I was soon making my way back across the grass with a big self-satisfied, smug grin on my face, tottin a chair and giving myself congrats for averting yet another crisis.

What happened next sure took the smug offa my mug right quick. Two big, burly men came up, one on either side of me, grabbed my arms and demanded to know, "Where the hell I thought I was going with their chair?". Oh Lord, why always me? The ensuing riot was enmasse. The mass being the two burly dudes, my family and the whole herd of bystanders within hearing distance. The riot being the two heavy duty dudes demanding an explanation, my family asking me all at once what was going on and not in harmony I might add and the bystanders well of course they had to throw in their two cents worth. Ever notice how opinionated people are? Not one of those bystanders had a clue as to what was actually going on but they all had an opinion on it anyway. I couldn't get a word in edgewise. What I needed was a way to get everyone's attention. Irony ranneth rampant. like I wasn't getting enough attention already?

Finally there was a bit of a lull in the hubbub and I jumped in with both feet and a hurried explanation to the two burly dudes as to the who, what, why and wherefores of my possession of said seat. Boy were their faces red. Served em right, accusing me of being a thief, the nerve of some people, me excluded of course. The burly dudes apologized left, right, front and centre and even offered to get a chair for my Dad too. All's well that ends well, heh heh. Boy I was sure glad to get back to the motel room for some much needed rest, NOT.

Since my folks were paying most of the shot for our hiatus from hell and being the sensible people they were, throughout our trip the motels we stayed in had to be air-conditioned and have a swimming pool. My folks were also thrifty and they always rented one motel room with two

double beds which was fine as I'm as thrifty as the next person not because I want to be but because I have to be, unfortunately I wasn't deaf and deaf is what a person would need to be once my parents went doo-dooz and started snoring cause if you weren't sleeping before they were you wouldn't be. As far as sawing logs go those two could have cut enough lumber to build a full size replica of the White House and that was just on the first night.

The next morning Dad and I were up before anybody in their right mind would be and we went across the road to a restaurant for brekky. Dad had his usual bacon, eggs, toast, juice, homefries and tea. I had my usual caffeine in a cup which was just as nutritious as Dad's breakfast. Well it was. The caffeine kept me alert. The two heaping teaspoons of sugar I added to it gave me energy and the effect of the double shot of cream I put in was twofold. First off the cream is made from milk and milk is good for you at least that's what the commercials on television say, something to do with calcium and women needing more. Apparently lack of calcium can cause brittle bones and brittle bones break. I knew that. Since the only broken bone I've ever had was in my nose when I was a kidlet (we covered that remember?) then obviously the cream in my coffee must be doing it's job. I'll bet you thought I wasn't health conscious, WRONG. I've got nothing against actually drinking a glass of milk, it just doesn't go with my cigarette as well as coffee does. The second effect of the cream in my coffee is it makes it drinkable.

After brekky Dad and I got Rob and Mom mobile and off we went back across the border to the U.S. and more importantly Wal-mart. We were practicing. You see once the wedding on Saturday was history and the brunch on Sunday was over with we were pulling a Hank Snow and "Movin On". We were going across the border to stay for a few days travelling across New York State then we'd actually shop. They's got laws you know. If you only cross the border for a few hours and shop then you have to pay a duty on whatever you bought, BUMMER, but if you go across and stay for a bit, say oh seven days then each person is allowed to bring back about 300.00 bucks or so worth of goodies duty free. Now were talkin shoppin, about 600 smackers worth. Yeah, 300 for me and Rob's 300 for me too. Aw come on, like I wasn't going to let the kid buy something? Give me a break. I'm a good Mom, damn good. Think about it. What does a nine year old kid buy? TOYS, TOYS and more TOYS. Here comes the good part. When I packed for our trip I included #1 son's toybox minus the toys. Brilliant or what? That way whatever he bought could go in the toybox and who's to say they weren't in there when we left home? I don't have to claim it as part of my duty free stuff and I can spend more money. Told you I was good.

Where were we? Oh yes, after practice we came back across the border to get a little R and R at the motel. We swam in the pool, laid in the sun and discovered April's offspring Kory had chicken pox. Oh joy, oh bliss, oh darn. Timing is everything and the kidlet sure picked his moment. It was a sign, an omen I'm sure of what was yet to come. Too bad I didn't read real well or else I'd have headed for the hills or home, home would've been good.

April was between a rock and a hard place, up the proverbial creek so to speak but she did have a paddle, her man Finn. April was the maid of honour so she had to be available for rehearsals, the bride's, Night Before I Take The Big Step Am I Out Of My Mind party and various other to-dos. Finn or Finsky as he's affectionately referred to by April is a take charge kind of guy which was just as well because he ended up with two kidlets totally in his charge. One whiny, cranky four year old male feverish with the dreaded pox, (pretty well sums up most of the male species with or without the pox don't it?) and one female teenybopper wannabe who

thought she knew it all and had no patience for anyone who didn't think she did. Whoops, I erred, I guess it was Finn who was between the rock and the hard place. Silly me, heh heh. Finn coped. I don't know how but he did and he did it without resorting to tactics. Tactics, you know, like spiking the teenybopper wannabe's wobbly pop with valium or givin the little guy an ice chip coated with crazy glue to bring his fever down and wet his lips and stick him to the wall at the same time. Take a relax. I'm just kidding, heh heh.

April felt so bad about leaving Finsky to cope while she attended the bride's, "Night Before I Take The Big Step Am I Out Of My Mind" party that she over-indulged and got tighter than a tick to help ease her conscience. Eventually she was able to ease her mind somewhat and take a relax. Boy did she relax, out cold. Amazing what a dozen or so doubles of Jack Daniel's will do for a body, it makes a body feel good, real good. Of course the morning after is usually a whole nother story. If April was feeling any after effects she sure didn't let on. Makes you sick don't it. It sure does me. I remember back a few years to one time I partied particularly hardy. I had been out celebrating my twenty-first birthday at a local bar with a girlfriend. I lost count after four drinks which isn't hard to do if your body's tolerance to alcohol is next to nothing and mine sure was. One drink made me feel good. Two drinks made me feel real good. The third drink had me sitting there grinning like the idiot I was for over indulging in the first place and continuing to over-indulge even more. I partied till I puked if you'll pardon the expression. I couldn't get out of bed for two days. I just wanted to die. How the hell do alcoholics do it? You've got to admire their tenacity however high they are on the stupidity scale.

It was now Saturday afternoon and time for the big event, the hangin. Kim and Chuck, the bride and groom were about to hang up their carefree single existence and don the cloak of responsibility. The wedding was being held in the backyard of the house they were renting at the time. Bales of hay were scattered throughout and rows of chairs were set up for the guests. Naturally the sky was overcast and threatening rain.

Everyone was praying the rain would hold off. To make a long story short, there's strength in numbers and power in prayer because the sun came out and the wedding went off without a hitch.

After the I do's were done there was a barb in the yard. Too bad the burgers weren't as well done as the I do's. The barby was enough to make you barf, big time. The burger I had was burnt on the outside and raw in the middle. The woman seated next to me was commenting in horror on the appalling state of the food being served and I was just about to agree with her when Mighty Mouth formerly known as #1 son looked at the woman with a surprised look on his face and said,"These are just like the ones my Mom makes." The woman looked at me with an incredulous expression then stood up and walked away. Humph, can I help it if cooking isn't my forte? I mean it's not like I set out to poison anyone purposely, heh heh. Oh by the way, did you know that salmonella typhimurium is a disease and that you get it from eating raw hamburger meat and it's sometimes lethal but not as lethal as the disease clostridium botulinum which you get from food not bottled or canned properly. Neat eh? You know I've always wanted to try my hand at home canning.

After we finished playing russian roulette with our din dins we had a couple of hours to rest up at the motel or head to emerg. at the nearest hospital depending on how much luck you had at the table. Mom, Dad, Rob and I spent the time resting at the motel. You see I am a good cook, (good for building up a resistance to those pesky little salmonella thingys). Canned peaches anyone? I made em myself.

Around 8:00p.m. we went to the dance. Rob was still wearing THE SHIRT and still bellyaching about it. Get past it Rob for heaven's sake, it's a cotton shirt not chain maille, SHEESH. Through a mix-up in the motel's baby sitter service April was left without one. Since Mom's back was bugging her and we were tired anyway we volunteered to babysit but not before I got the goods on the kid. You see Rob was a typical nine year old. He didn't associate with yucky ole girls and he didn't dance. I spied him up on the dance floor dancing with, you got it, a GIRL. GOTCHA!!! Hell it was almost better than winning the lottery. I said almost. Anyway now I had leverage. If #1 son got out of hand all I would have to do was wonder out loud of course what his buddies back home would say about him dancing, with a girl and doing it in public. Extortion schmortion, all's fair in love, war and parental pursuits.

We all had an early night and next morning after attending the brunch for the bride and groom we started our real vacation, the unplanned part. As we were crossing the border into the U.S. Mighty Mouth was told not to say a word, NOT A WORD. When Dad rolled down his window, the border guard looked right at Rob and asked, "Where are you from?".

Rob looked over at me with guilt written all over his face and asked questionably, "Mom?", like he didn't know what to answer. Why, oh why did he have to pick then to do what he was told and for the first time in his life I might add? It reminded me of a similar and equally embarrassing moment a few years earlier with #1 daughter.

I had called the local police to report a ring that had mysteriously disappeared about the same time my babysitter left. My daughter Missy was playing in the living room when the officer who came to take a report knocked on the front door. Since I was in the bathroom at the other end of the house, Missy answered the door. When she saw who it was she ran screaming through the house yelling, "Quick Mom hide. It's the cops!!". I guess I should have explained to Missy that they were coming and why. Why on earth she reacted that way I don't know. It wasn't like they were regular visitors with official police business because they weren't and they didn't, honest. Would I lie? Anyway, I told Rob, "Answer the man", which he did and after a few more routine questions we were on our way. WHEW.

Our first stop was the Mohawk Indian Reserve. Indian reserves were renowned for cheap gas, cigarettes and gambling and we wanted to get our share. For many moons preceding our vacation the indian and the white man hadn't been getting along (so what else is new eh?) and their standoffs had received more press coverage than the Tonya Harding and Lorena Bobbitt hullabaloos ever got combined. Some standoffs were more memorable than others. Like the one my Aunt was watching on television while waiting for my uncle to come home from work for supper, work being the R.C.M.P. Yep, good ole Unk was one of Canada's finest, a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman. Now Aunty was getting a little worried because Unk was a tad late and hadn't called her but they say a picture is worth a thousand words and that's what Aunty got, a picture. There on the T.V. screen was Unk right smack dab in the middle of the uprising.

Now you'd think seeing Unk would have put Aunty's fears to rest and it might have except while she was watching Unk on T.V. a native fella walked up and bonked Unk right up along side his head which gave Aunty much cause for consternation. However Unk being of sound mind if not body was soon on the mend and the whole incident was just a memory albeit a bad one but certainly more memorable than others.

In the reserve we stopped at a gas station-cum-store. Dad filled up the gas tank with cheap gas, Mom and I bought cheap cigarettes and Rob got five dollars worth of break open nevada

tickets and won fifty dollars. Now that's the way to start a vacation and it was thanks to the native americans. Whoever said, "The only good indian is a dead indian.", besides being bonkers and biased must not have owned a car, smoked or gambled. It would seem all he had to do was sit around all day and make up stupid statements. GET A LIFE PAL.

After leaving the indian reserve we stopped at our dream destination, well Mom's and mine anyway, Wal-mart and right across the road was a huge shopping mall. While there we finally got to buy all the goodies we'd been looking at on our practice runs. Don't let anyone tell you heaven's just a sin away cause it's not, it's across the border at Wal-mart and the mall.

After we shopped till we dropped we headed up, down, whatever the highway looking for a motel for the night. We were tired and besides Mom and I wanted to gloat over our purchases. There's no greater feeling in the world than to shop and know you've done well. Boy did I do well. Mom had previously ordered a skirt to wear to the wedding from a mail order place in the U.S. It had cost her $99.00. I walked into Wal-mart and bought the exact same skirt for $19.99. GLOAT, GLOAT, like I said there's no greater feeling.

We finally found a suitable motel and stopped for the night. Now Dad got to do his thing, his thing being unloading the car which believe me took some doing considering it was packed in layers. The bottom layer consisted of our suitcases. The middle layer contained tote bags and whatnot filled with stuff we couldn't cram in our suitcases and the top layer was for our goodies we'd gotten shoppin. Naturally our night things were in the suitcases on the bottom layer so the whole car had to be unloaded not just that night but every night of our trip. We had to do it that way because there was absolutely no other way that everything would fit otherwise and it was a big, roomy putt putt. Mom and Dad had bought it when they won the lottery, oh didn't I tell you about that?

Every Saturday night after the 649 draw was on television I'd check my tickets and then phone the old folks at home to tell them what I'd won which was usually zilch or next to it and ask them what they'd won which was usually zilch as well. On one particular Saturday night Mom told me she'd got the encore number and the conversation went something like this:

Mom quite calmly: I got the encore number. I think that's worth $1,000.00.

Me excitedly: The whole thing, every number?

Mom calmly: Yes.

Me getting more excited: Number for number?

Mom calmly: Yes.

Me getting even more excited: Mom I think that's worth about $200,000.00. I could be wrong but I think it is.

Mom getting excited: You think so? No it couldn't be that much.

Me really hyper: I think it is. I'm going to call Mike's Mart, they sell tickets, they'll know.

I made the call and the clerk told me the prize was $250,000.00. Oh WOW! Make that a double WOW WOW!! No not BOW WOW, back off I'm the writer here. After a couple of attempts I finally got Mom's phone number right.

Me all bent outta shape: Mom, it's $250.000.00. You won $250,000.00. The clerk at Mike's confirmed it. YAHOO!!!

Mom (I don't know how but) quite calmly: How wonderful.

Me babbling: You've won a quarter of a million dollars. Your rich, rich, rich.

Mom was so calm but that was only because it hadn't sunk in yet but by the next morning it had and Mom and Dad were both basket cases babbling and carrying on something wicked but it

was wonderful. Anyway with some of their winnings Mom and Dad bought a Caprice Classic station wagon equipped with all kinds of goodies including a privacy cover for the back which on this trip was no use whatever. There was so much crammed into the back of the wagon there's no way the privacy cover would fit and that was only after the first day of shopping.

The next morning we were up early and pulling a Willie Nelson, "On The Road Again" in search of sustenance, brekky. A few miles later we went into this little town where we found a little diner- cum-store. It was the shabbiest little dinner but the service and the food were excellent. Dad had his usual bacon and eggs bit, Mom and Rob had pancakes and I had my cup of caffeine. Since Mom and Dad had been so good about Rob and I sharing their holiday I decided to be magnanimous and pay for brekky. I expected the tab to be between fifteen and twenty dollars. Would you believe the total cost was $6.35? I kid you not. Can I pick my moments or what?

After leaving the diner we meandered on, up, down, whatever the highway taking the secondary highways wherever we could, just taking our time, enjoying the scenery and shopping. I don't know how many Wal-marts and malls there are in New York state but there were very few we missed. You'd be amazed from what distance I can spot a sign for a Wal-mart store. I amazed myself. As soon as I'd spot the sign my heart would start pounding and I'd get real short of breath. Of course Mom hollerin at Dad to pull over and stop before we passed it and Dad trying to cut across three lanes of heavy traffic to comply may have had a tad to do with my physical state. It sure as hell affected my mental state. I was TERRIFIED!! All that kept going through my mind was the thought that thank God I'd bought out of country health insurance before I'd left home closely followed by, "If your gonna crack us up Dad at least have the decency to wait until after we've shopped. I mean REALLY, being in an accident would be bad enough but to be involved in one just moments before shopping in the store you had the accident trying to get to in the first place would be downright cruel". I don't know if it was a guardian angel or the president of the American Retailers Association sitting on our shoulder but thankfully I never got to use my out of country health insurance.

By now it was Monday evening and I was exhausted, mentally and physically. I found it hard to believe we'd only been on vacation for twenty-four hours. It felt like forever. Webster's, "freedom from regular duties and engagements: a holiday" definition of a vacation just wasn't cuttin it. If he'd incorporated, EXHAUST: to use the whole strength of, and TERROR: an object of fear or dread, with it he'd have been right on.

We found a motel and Dad proceeded to unload the car grumbling all the while about the amount of goodies Mom and I had bought and Mom supervised. Rob and I had a swim in the pool to revive us enough to eat din dins and then we laid us down to sleep. The one good thing about being so exhausted was we slept right through Mom and Dad's sawmill operation in the next bed.

The next day was pretty much a carbon copy of the day before except for the starship Enterprize going into warp drive and firing flotron torpedoes. No, I'm not a treky although you gotta love Data. Rob is the treky and the day before while shopping I'd bought him a whole bunch of star trek figures, a communicator and a model of the Enterprize complete with very realistic sound effects. Naturally Rob played with them while riding along in the car. He just about drove Dad right round the bend and I don't mean the one on the highway. Everytime Rob fired the flotron torpedoes Dad ducked. Now I can sort of understand Dad's reaction because there's a railway bridge over one of the main streets at home and for the first six to eight years I

lived there I ducked everytime I drove under it. It's a normal reaction. Well it IS, isn't it? Well it's not as ridiculous as my two year old niece Cassy's reaction. Her mother had been teaching her the sounds different critters make and one day not long after she was sitting on the kitchen counter at her grandmothers and an open cupboard door started to swing shut and was coming right at her. Her grandmother who couldn't reach her in time yelled, " CASSY, QUICK DUCK," so Cassy went, "QUACK QUACK". The cupboard door hit her a WHACK right in her face. Pretty fowl eh? Heh heh. Oh she was okay it didn't hit her that hard. Heck it hardly took any time at all to clean up all the blood. I'm kidding, it never left a mark on her and Cassy didn't even cry. It was hilarious. I think the funniest part was the look on her grandmother's face who from the look of things actually expected Cassy to duck. Anyway it kinda makes you wonder where Dad's been if the sound of a flotron torpedo being fired makes him duck, uh huh and all this time Mom thought he was out putterin around in his workshop.

Tuesday night sure wasn't a carbon copy of the night before. It was the night I realized I should've headed er for home from Cornwall. The motel we stayed at was nice enough, it even had a coin laundry. The only problem was it's location. From our room you had to go outside, walk the length of the motel, hang a left, go down a passageway, hang another left, walk the length of the swimming pool, go up a flight of stairs, go down another passage way, through a set of doors, hang a right and go the length of the motel yet again. You got it, I was the chosen one. If I'd had a weight problem which I didn't I wouldn't have had by the time the laundry was finally done. Quite frankly I was done long before the laundry.

There was one other thing or I should say things that set Tuesday night apart from Sunday and Monday night. You see a friend of my daughters, Dan, was staying at my house while we were on vacation because my daughter, Missy, had gone and moved out less than a week before our holiday was to start after assuring me repeatedly that she'd be there to look after things while we were gone. When I called home to check on things I was told about a whole bunch of things, things being kittens, seven of em and their mother, Sassy, wasn't taking kindly to Dan or her offspring. To make a long story short Missy lied, Dan tried but most of the kittens died. I was so depressed. This had been Sassy's first litter and she wasn't supposed to be due until two weeks after I got home from holidays. So much for timing. Who ever said, "Timing is everything," was right on.

Wednesday we found a charming little motel in the Finger Lakes district between Auburn and Skeneattles, New York where we decided to stay put for a bit. The motel had the nicest pool of any we'd seen with deck chairs and tables all around it. You know at every motel we stayed at we had to sign a paper stating that if anything happened to us while using the pool we wouldn't hold the motel owners liable. Apparently in New York it's a state law, you have to sign or else, or else being no signy, no roomy which actually isn't a bad idea although at the time I thought it was a little strange as there is no such law in Canada. A few weeks after returning home from holiday a newspaper article I read made sense of the reason for having to sign the paper at the motels in New York. The newspaper article told of how this guy was visiting the home of some friends who had a pool. The guy thought it was great fun to enter the pool via the roof of the house. Now the people who owned the house admonished their friend regarding the foolhardiness of his actions and requested he cease forthwith before he did serious bodily harm to his person.

Well the fool didn't and he did do serious bodily harm to his person. Would you believe the fool had the nerve to actually sue his friends for his own stupidity? Ridiculous or what but wait

it went from the ridiculous to the sublime cause the fool actually won his lawsuit. What were the couple who owned the pool supposed to do? Throw the fool out bodily? Yeah right, then he would have in all probability charged them with assault. Whatever happened to the good ole days when all you had to worry about was hanging a sign that read, "We don't swim in your toilet, Please don't pee in our pool".

Speaking of ridiculous, I recently saw a commercial on television for the local networks nightly news report. In the commercial the announcer stated that every day in North America 3.8 people are struck by lightening and out of those 3.8 people 3 survive. Would someone like to tell me how .8 of a person survives? Better yet what the bloody hell constitutes .8 of a person? Is .8 a body part? Toodle-e-doo tooshie or how bout singing Happy Trails to a left extremity? Oh I know it all has something to do with percentages but it does sound absolutely silly. Just as silly as having 2.4 children or owning 1.5 cars.

Anyway back to the motel. We spent all of Wednesday and Thursday there. Dad was happy, it meant a respite from loading and unloading the car, well sort of. You see Auburn had two Wal-marts not to mention a lot of other fine places to shop and Mom and I took full advantage of them. Wednesday and Thursday were identical. We'd have an early brekky, shop in Auburn till noon, have lunch, go back to the motel, laze by the pool all afternoon, go back into Auburn for din dins and then shop till the stores closed. Dad may not of had to load and unload as much because we stayed put at one motel but after all our shopping in Auburn Mom and I gave him a pile to load when we left Auburn on Friday morning.

Thursday night before retiring Mom. Dad and I made a list of our purchases to show the guard at the border when we crossed back into Canada and we were fairly honest about it. I said fairly not perfectly, nobody's perfect. Let's just say that not one of us went over our duty free limit at least not on paper, the paper we were going to show the border guard that is.

Dad had decided Friday morning while loading the car that we were going back across the border that day and he was adamant about it. He wasn't going to keep unloading and loading the car. I don't know what he was so hyper about we couldn't have fit anything else in anyway.

We got to Lewistown where we were going to cross about noon. Dad insisted we have lunch before we crossed as he figured the border guard would take one look at our load and make us unload everything while he went through it piece by piece. Dad figured we'd be there for hours and after eyeing up our load which was piled tightly right up to the ceiling of the car I figured he was probably right. We'd have been hard pressed to find a space to jam a toothpick in. Actually I was glad we were going back into Canada mainly because my money was running low and I was worried about my cat Sassy, remember kittens? Uh huh, now you got it.

Before we crossed the border Dad, under protest I might add stopped at the duty free shop so I could load up on cheap cigarettes (Dad didn't smoke) which I had to put on my lap because of the aforementioned lack of space. Amazing ain't it how you can always find room for the important stuff? We then joined the very long line-up of vehicles waiting to cross into Canada. After about three quarters of an hour or so it was finally our turn which we were dreading but luck was with us, or Murphy was on holiday or else the moon was in the fifth house of the seventh planet or something because after a few short questions the guard waved us through. We had nothing to fear but fear itself. Boy talk about a car full of grinning idiots and you know Dad hardly even flinched when he told the guard we'd been in the U.S. for about two weeks, which was the required amount of time we had to be there to bring back what we did duty free or at least the amount we'd claimed on paper. Okay, okay, I know we were only there five days and four nights

but it felt like more. I mean we'd bought enough stuff to have been there shopping for two weeks. That should count for something shouldn't it? If nothing else the American Retailers Association should at least give us some sort of recognition for our contributions after all we gave them our money, lots of it.

Now we were back in Canada the plan was to stay at my sister April's in Bramalea till Sunday then go home. I said my money was running low, I was down but not out yet. I still had enough to do some shopping, April lived real close to a big mall, naturally. We'd even solved the space problem. Rob was going to stay at April's for a few days extra and come home with her when she came to visit the next weekend. We had the space where Rob normally sat in the car to fill up which Mom and I did quite admirably, much to Dad's chagrin. He kept mutterin something about, "Give em an inch and they take a mile".

While at April's I phoned home so often you'd have thought I owned a block of stock in Ma Bell which incidently I didn't but wished I had when I got my phone bill. Happily while in Bramalea, April, Mom and I took in a few sessions of bingo and we won enough to keep me solvent a bit longer. Here it was only the tenth of the month and it was still a long way to my disability cheque at the end of the month. Ain't it amazing how there's always so much month left at the end of the money?

Anyway I kept calling home to check on Sassy and her offspring. Poor Dan, he was trying his best but Sassy wasn't. She wouldn't have a thing to do with her kittens. Everytime I called Dan would be in tears over the loss of one or another of the kittens. He'd gone to a veterinarian and gotten a bottle and special formula to try and feed the kittens himself. He'd also called my friend Barb to help out while he was at work but it was no use.

By the time I got home on Sunday there were two kittens at a friend's house being fed by her cat who'd recently gave birth and two still alive at my house. Since co-operation didn't seem to be in Sassy's vocabulary I took the two kittens from my house to be adopted by my friend's cat as well. Less than twenty-four hours later they had gone to join their three other siblings already at the big scoopable litter box in the sky. The two kittens taken to my friend's first did survive. A male and a female. The female I gave to my friend who's cat had been their surrogate mother and I kept the male and named him Snooper.

Well it was over, my vacation and Webster pretty much covered it by his definition, "Freedom from regular duties and engagements" but maybe he should expand his definition a tad bit more to include what that freedom from regular duties and engagements actually means. He needs to cover the consequences. I was totally, utterly and undeniably exhausted, mentally and physically. It took me a good month to rest up from my freedom from regular duties and engagements. The next time if ever someone mention's vacation to me I'm going to close my eyes, click the heels of my red runners together three times and repeat, "There's no place like home", over and over till whomever goes away minus me. Whoever said, "Live each day to the fullest", obviously never had kids or cats or knew my parents.

CHAPTER TEN: MY CLOCKS A CUCKOO

There are two kinds of women in this ole world. The one kind is the type of woman who'll buy a foil pan to roast a turkey in so she can throw the pan out instead of having to scrub it and then decides after using it that there's still some use left in it and so ends up scrubbing it clean anyway. Then there's the kind of woman I am who just throws the damn foil pan out. Life's too short to be scrubbin a lot of pots and pans. My idea of one of life's little pleasures doesn't include an SOS or Brillo pad. Nor does it include a lot of elbow grease. Speaking of elbow grease, when good ole ex-hubby and I were cohabitating I did a stint as a cookie at the sawmill where he worked. I said COOKIE not tart. You know, remember the trailer we lived in back in the boonies where hubby had so much trouble with animal control, mine. Yep, that's the place, the one with the moose, snakes and of course the unforgettable weasel. Well anyway the cook, my boss, was a fairly ancient lady of french canadian origin. She spoke pretty good english although for some reason she always mispronounced my name and called me Dino. She was a real taskmistress. She made me use her homemade lye soap to scrub the cookery and dining room floors and to wash the dishes with and boy were there dishes. I had to wash dishes three times a day for approximately fifty men plus the dishes from mid morning and afternoon snacks. I'd have sold my soul for an automatic dishwasher. Her homemade lye soap was powerful stuff. Have you ever seen what putting a rusty nail in a bottle of cola overnight will do to the nail? It eats the rust right off of the nail, well the lye soap I used was twice as potent. The cook made me scrub everything with it. There was one table though that resisted all my efforts at cleanliness. When I explained to the cook that nothing seemed to work on the table she asked the company clerk for some suggestions. He told her to try some elbow grease. The next day she went into town to the hardware store to buy elbow grease. Now I could have explained to her what elbow grease was but let's face it, I made thirty-five dollars a week for working sixty very long hours and I felt I was entitled to a few perks. That one was priceless. It was comparable to the time she kept complaining to me about the mechanic always coming in to eat in his dirty, greasy old pants. I told her to tell him about it, which she did. When the mechanic came in the next time to eat he wasn't wearing his dirty, greasy old pants, he wasn't wearing any pants. Now that's a high point in anyone's day. The old cook was flabbergasted. She stuttered and stammered, got all red faced and exited stage left. I think the mechanic got his point across. He came into the dining room three times a day to eat and he wasn't going to shower and change his clothes everytime just because his work clothes offended her sense of cleanliness. At least I think that was his point or maybe he was just advertising, who cares what his point was, the results were what counted.

If your a woman who's young, wealthy, sexy, beautiful, self confident and intelligent then describing yourself honestly is no problem. I lack a few of the above attributes but I'm gonna give it a whirl anyway not that I'm a bow wow you understand. Why in grade five I was a contender for the Miss Pee Wee Lacrosse title. I didn't win but it wasn't because of my looks or lack thereof, heck no, I simply got so nervous I kept throwing up so I made my Dad take me home before the judging started.

I stand five feet, five inches tall. I weigh around the hundred pound mark at times and around the one hundred and ten mark at other times. The other times are dependant upon my mood, if I'm in the mood I'll eat. I eat at least once a day and sometimes twice. My breakfast consists of coffee, coffee and more coffee, decaf of course. I don't believe personally in the three meals a day bit, I eat when I'm hungry. Of course contrarily I make sure my kidlets eat three,

good, wholesome meals a day but that's the mother in me. I obviously don't practice what I preach. I've heard it said, "You are what you eat", boy am I in trouble. When I was younger my lack of weight and bosoms used to bother me. When I was a teenybopper I waited and waited for my puny little body to blossom into glorious womanhood, well I'm forty-three years of age and I'm still waiting. I've heard of late bloomers but this is going from the ridiculous to the sublime.

When I was first married my hubby took a lot of ribbing over my size. His friends would ask him if he shook the bedsheets to find me in the morning or if he pinned me to the pillow at night. Nice friends eh? The only time I gained any weight was when I was pregnant and like with most everything else I do I went overboard. I gained fifty-two pounds with each child. I literally looked like one of those stick figures people make when they can't draw worth a darn. You know, a big circle for the body with little lines sticking out of the circle representing arms and legs, whoops, that's a bug, anyway you get the idea. My eyes are hazel colour except when I cry then they are the prettiest shade of green. My hair is long and naturally curly. All my life I've been cursed with the frizzies because of my natural curl but now frizz isn't frowned upon as it once was. I did horrible things to my hair trying to get rid of the frizzies, nothin worked. I ironed my hair which helped temporarily but as soon as there was the least little bit of dampness in the air, POUFF!! I tried straightening my hair by giving myself a perm backwards and for a few days I thought I'd solved the problem but then I got caught in the rain and I ended up with hair that looked like the scarecrow's in the Wizard of Oz. I even tried giving myself a perm the regular way and I ended up looking like a french poodle badly in need of a haircut. Boy talk about your bad hair day, I've had a bad hair day for the last forty-two years (my first year of life I didn't have any hair). My hair colour varies from brunette to red to blonde and a whole lot in between and is also dependant on my mood. You should see some of the moods I get myself into. You'll notice I haven't mentioned the colour gray and I ain't gonna either.

A lot of women worry about getting wrinkles, their hair turning silver, love handles, sagging breasts and expanding waistlines. Speaking of expanding waistlines, since I started writing this book I have managed to put on three or four pounds. When I mentioned my weight gain to a girlfriend of mine who's always nagging me about my eating habits and told her that I actually had a little pot belly she replied without batting an eyelash, "So do the starving Somalians". Point taken. When I told a male friend of mine who hadn't seen me in awhile I had a little pot belly he told me I should send it a little north. North of what? Oh I get it, it's that ole bosoms thing again, smart ass. By the way, just what exactly are love handles? I've often heard people refer to them, usually men, but never in the same context. Are they a nice way of saying, "Go hibernate baby" or does it have something to do with actually making love and if so how or should I say why? I'd do an in-depth investigation but I'm a tad short on the necessary attributes, at least thirty pounds and six or seven inches.

Compared to my kids I must have been real backwards, incredibly naive or just plain stupid when I was growing up. I was born in the big city but I spent most of my formative years out, no not behind the barn, I was gonna say out of the city. A few months back my niece gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Ever notice how all babies are beautiful no matter how ugly they are? The questions my son asked me about the birth were all questions I would never dreamed of asking even when I myself was giving birth. Whatever happened to simple innocence and questions like, "Do dogs dream?" and "Why are there rainbows?". You gave your kids an answer and that was that, kids took your word for things, they didn't test their parents intelligence. Hell I was fifteen before I knew what the word horny meant and I didn't find out through personal

experience either. One night on television someone said they had pulled a boner. My son said they were talking dirty. I explained that a boner meant a mistake. My son told me that a boner was when a guy's private got hard. Children sure pick up a lot from their friends at school thank heavens they now have sex education classes starting in the primary grades to counteract the fairy tales their friends tell them about sex.

Oh they had sex education classes when I went to school too, only they were called health classes. It started in grade nine and was taught by the boys shop teacher. Actually the class was a real hoot, all you had to do was ask the teacher a question that even remotely had anything to do with sex and his face would turn shades of red you couldn't even begin to imagine. The poor man hadn't a clue about teaching a class of titterin girls let alone teaching them about sex. Last I heard they were considering releasing him from the institution and I don't mean the one for higher learning, heh heh.

According to my doctor I'm going through "The Change". I guess that means I ain't a gonna blossom, however, I'll have you know all is not lost. You know those pimples or zits as there more commonly referred to today that accompanies blossoming into womanhood, well guess who's finally gettin em? Who else eh? Forty-three years of age and I get my first zit, I tell you my biological clock is a cuckoo. I know women who are twenty years my senior who are just starting to go through "The Change". I'm a late bloomer but wouldn't you just know it, THAT I'd be early for. Shoot, I've patiently waited all these years for nothin. They say patience is a virtue, hah, I don't feel very virtuous. As a matter of fact I feel a little hot, no, not hot under the collar, sort of hot all over as in hot flash. Now I don't know about hot flashes in other women but I can tell you they sure cause a lot of upheaval around my house. Imagination this, the temperature is minus thirty-two degrees celsius outside with a wind chill factor of minus forty-five degrees. Ye ole furnace is blowing heat up the ductwork to keep the house warm at a rate that puts stockholders in the gas company in a state of euphoric bliss and Mom gets a prolonged hot flash. Down goes the thermostat and Mom starts peeling off layers of clothing all the while doing a non-stop monologue on how hot it is. Meanwhile the two children of the house sit huddled together, shivering uncontolably with their teeth chattering. So why don't Mom's offspring say something to her about being cold? They keep their mouths shut because besides hot flashes "The Change" also causes a few mood swings. Mood swings that make a launch at Kennedy Space Centre look like poppin the cork on a bottle of bubbly. Once after a really moody mood in which my son witnessed Mom in full fury he asked in a meek little wavery voice, "Mom, how long does this change thing last?" When I told him that it could last a couple of years or more he looked at me with such a look of horror and said, "Oh no". Pay back time, I'll bet now he wishes I had sent him to the store for a loaf of bread and moved while he was gone.

I'm the type of person who gets upset over seeing dead animals on the side of the road and I'll go out of my way not to step on a creepy crawly thing on the ground. If there's a spider in one of my sinks and I want to use that sink I'll gentle move the spider so he won't drown when I turn the water on. When getting a new pet I always take the runt of the litter because that's the one who needs the most love and attention. I like to help people, not for any praise or kudos for doing it but because it makes me feel good. I don't like wasting energy on emotions like hate or envy, all it does is make you frown and frowning causes wrinkles. I do have some wrinkles you know, okay okay, lots of wrinkles but they do give my face character and you gotta admit after reading this book that I am quite a character.

There have been a lot of influences in my life but the biggest one is country music. It's just

like me, down to earth yet out of this world, sad yet happy, thoughtful yet forgetful, careful yet impulsive. There once was a butcher named Hutton, Who had a wife who loved to eat mutton, One day he slipped up behind her And pushed her into the grinder No Hutton, no mutton, no nuthin. One night when all the stars were lit, My Pa went out to stroll a bit, When he came back Ma had a fit, The stars were gone but he was lit. One day a drunk was pulled over by the police for going the wrong way down a one-way street. Officer: Sir, don't you think you've had a little too much to drink to be drivin? Drunk: I gotta drive officer, I'm too drunk to walk. Officer: Sir, you were going the wrong way down a one-way street. Didn't you see the arrows? Drunk: Arrows? I didn't even see the Indians!

Subsequently the drunk was arrested and brought before the judge. Judge: Order in the court. Drunk: I'll have a beer.

The above was part of a country radio show I heard as a kid. It's been thirty odd years and I still remember it and they say the mind is the first to go. They obviously don't know didley squat. I love country music. Most people can really identify with it and I'm no exception. As a teenager I went through a rock and roll phase but I was always a country girl at heart. If I was out walkin at night it was Patsy Cline's, Walking After Midnight that would be playing in my mind. If money was tight or non-existent which it usually was then Bill Anderson's, Po Folks would be playin. If I felt lonely there were any number of songs which would apply, anyway you get the idea. Back then the songs of Dolly Parton, Buck Owens, Porter Wagoner, Loretta Lynn, Marty Robbins and Hank Williams were a big part of my life.

I've always been what most people refer to as hyper, I think of it as perky. A lot of my friends will ask me what I'm on because they want some. I know it's clicheish but I'm high on life and country music is a real upper. It's pure entertainment. Ever notice how much easier it is to work at something if there's music playing? No kiddin, when I have to do the Suzy Homemaker bit I just put on some of my favorite C.D.'s and boogie right through the housework. I tend to look a tad silly bee-boppin along but then I don't usually have an audience. As soon as I mention housework my illustrious offspring pull a Houdini routine and disappear until it's all done.

My earliest memory of country music was an old 78 r.p.m. record of Johnny Cash singing, I Walk The Line. Mom and Dad when they weren't on the outs used to have Saturday night get-togethers. Dad would play his guitar, someone else would play something else, a comb or whatever and we would all sing along. We sure as heck weren't no Carter Family but then no-one gave a hoot, we had fun. Back then you mostly made up your own entertainment. Impromptu get-togethers, hay rides, skating parties and Saturday afternoon at the movies were what was happening. Entertainment was simple and very inexpensive compared with today. Today entertainment consists largely of state of the art video games with power zapper do-dads with computerized this, that and the other thing. My son has one of them which he saved his allowance for a whole year to buy. The only thing I can play on it is a thing called Duck Hunt. You take this little gun like thingy and shoot at the ducks when they fly up outta the bushes on the television screen. If you miss there's a dog that pops up, he puts his paws over his mouth and goes heh heh heh at you. Some entertainment, all I get is ticked off at the dog for laughing at me. I hate that damn dog.

There is an up side to all this electronic wizardry. Recently our local cable television company added the Country Music Television channel, C.M.T., for their viewers. It's made me happier than a mudwump in a bucket of swamp mud. It gives country music a whole new

dimension and me an overdraft at the bank from buying blank video tapes to record all my favorite country music videos. I'm also doing untold damage to the muscles in my finger from pressing the record button on my remote control but boy are my reflexes gettin good. If a video comes on that I want to record I can make it from the kitchen to the livingroom, pick up the remote control and press record in 1.7 seconds. Damn I'm good. Even the commercials on C.M.T. are entertaining. It's hard to top flying cows that sing and Marty Stuart wearing a jacket and holding a guitar that are both a colour co-ordinated perfect match to the wallpaper used for the backdrop in the commercial.

Country music videos make country music even more personal. I get to see all my favorite artists perform, it's almost better than roller skating. Hah gotcha, you thought I was gonna say sex didn't you? The truth is I probably know more about roller skating than I do sex. I'm still waiting for Mr. Right to come along and light my fire. If patience is a virtue than I must be really virtuous, heh heh, yeah I know, me neither, I couldn't keep a straight face even while saying it.

By watching C.M.T. I've made some observations about male country singers. First off they all wear their hats low down on their foreheads. Why, are they all bald on top? Secondly they all wear excruciatingly tight jeans. Does it have something to do with hittin the high notes? Finally they all seem to drive Cadillacs. Is it a status thing or do they get one hell of a discount? Does anyone have the answers? I'd sure appreciate it if you'd pass on the information to me. I just won't rest easy not knowin. I'm kidding, well maybe. I just hope this doesn't ruin my chances of meeting Dwight Yoakam or Aaron Tippin, as if eh?

I don't want you to think the great bodies in the tight jeans or a handsome face is why I really enjoy watching country music videos although it is a definite plus. No, what impresses me is the music, honestly. The newest artist I'm most impressed with would be Aaron Tippin. I like his music, his lyrics and the way he gets them across to an audience. They say you can tell a lot about a person from their music and Aaron's music speaks volumes. He's a caring, loving man with a great sense of humour, he must have, how many men do you know who would name his car Daisy and then admit it to millions of people with a song on the country music charts? Not too darn many. Now that took guts and imagination, an unbeatable combination. Turns my crank. It takes a special sort of person to be able to laugh at themselves, Aaron's one and so am I. I don't know about Aaron but I've had lots of practice. Aaron's got an alright set of values too. His daughter is the most important person in his life and she comes before anything or anyone else. During a television interview Aaron said he discussed his recording career with his daughter before he decided to go for it. Parents are faced with many, many difficult decisions through the years and each and every decision has an effect on their children. Now parents can either take their children, wet their lips and stick em to a wall somewhere and forget em or they can be responsible and do what's in everyone's best interests. Aaron Tippin is one heck of a man and one hell of a good father. Of course that's only my opinion with a little intuition mixed in but it is my opinion and I'm entitled to it under the Constitution Of the United States of America. The fact I'm a Canadian is beside the point. Okay, okay so I've got a bit of a crush on the guy, I can dream can't I? You've got your Mel Gibson and whoever so I can have my Aaron Tippin. I said Aaron Tippin was the newest country artist I was most impressed with. The one not so newest artist that impresses me the most is Dwight Yoakam. His music is great. I don't know much about his personality but damn he looks good in those ole frayed, very tight jeans of his. Nice buns.

Once in a while when I was a kid there would be a country music extravaganza at the Town

Hall. Well I guess it really wasn't an extravaganza. It was in actuality a performance of sorts called the Ernie somebody show. It consisted of Ernie on the guitar singing with his wife Candy, a drummer and a steel guitar player named uh maybe he was the one called Candy, oh well I guess it doesn't matter except maybe to Ernie. It was sure a lot of fun and whenever Ernie came to town he played to a house full to burstin. Ernie always encouraged a lot of audience participation. One time he called my Uncle Carl and his date Linda up on stage. You remember Uncle Carl of dingle balls and whore lure fame don't you? Anyway, Ernie tied a piece of string around the centre of a dollar bill and then gave Carl one end of the string and Linda the other. Ernie then got them to put their end of the string in their mouth and put their hands behind their backs. They had to chew the string like they were eating spaghetti and the first one to get to the dollar bill got to keep it. Uncle Carl's and Linda's enthusiasm was overwhelming, although personally I think it was the fact they got to have what I think was their first kiss or a somewhat reasonable facsimile and not the dollar bill that got them all excited.

The whole show was simple and unpretentious except for the steel guitar player who acted like he was God's answer to a maiden's prayer or again a reasonable facsimile. You went to the show expecting to have a good time and you were never disappointed. I don't know about you but I've always found that simple is best not to mention a whole lot easier. No, I'm not lazy I just like things simple and no I don't mean simple minded either but if you'd ever caught my act at school assemblies you might wonder. I used to get up on stage and do a comedy routine to El Paso, a Marty Robbins hit song. I'd have everyone in stitches. I've always thought of myself as the Canadian subsidiary of Minnie Pearl. I love singing along with all my favorite artists and although I have canary legs that's where any resemblance to a song bird ends. I'm one of those people who need a suitcase to carry a tune but I don't care. I sing along because I enjoy it even if no-one else appreciates it, which they don't.

One time when Hubby and I were still co-habitating he talked me into visiting the local waterin hole in Marten River with him. I actually got up on stage and sang a song. I thought I sounded pretty good even if I was pissy-faced drunk at the time. I like to think I wasn't half bad because no-one told me to sit down and shut up, no-one booed me and no-one got up and left. I find it hard to believe that EVERYONE there could've been too drunk to really not notice me. It takes a lot of nerve for a person to get up on a stage and make a complete and utter fool of themself. Luckily I've got more nerve than a bull moose wearing an orange vest practicing the Achy Breaky dance in an open field during hunting season. I'd like to try something in the country music industry, don't worry, I promise I won't sing unless it's part of a comedy routine. Maybe I could write lyrics, it's not beyond the realm of possibility. Aw give me a break, I CAN write you know. I done gad-e-atd fifth grade. Besides where do you think this book came from, Sears and Roebuck? Yeah right.

Today's country music is bigger and better than ever. Too bad I couldn't say the same for the motion picture industry. There's too much violence, sex, blood, guts, gore and foul language in most of the current movies, of course the above description could also apply to the nightly newscast on television as well. I think I kind of got turned off on movies just after good ole Hubby and I got hitched. He took me to see the movie Slapshot starring Paul Newman. When Newman told someone to F.O. and he didn't mean fry onions I was shocked and embarrassed. I'm no prude but there is a time and place for everything and foul language in public is not the proper time or place.

I like movies full of romance or ones with lots of singing and or comedies. A happy ending

is a must especially one of those tear jerkers where just when all hope is lost along comes a knight in shining armour to save the day. Only in the movies eh? If a knight showed up dressed in armour these days he'd probably be an escapee from the local looney bin. I always cry during sad movies but then again I cry over some of McDonald's commercials. I may be sappy to some insensitive clods but quite frankly my dear I don't give a darn. One time when I was about ten years old I was at the Saturday afternoon matinee at the local theatre and an elderly man from my neighborhood was there. Like all old people seem to do every once in a while, he'd hock up some phelm and spit it out or maybe he was chewing tabaccy, anyway the kids kept makin fun of him and laughing. It brought tears to my eyes. I felt so sorry for him. When the movie was over and everyone went outside I walked right over to the old man, I put my arm through his and asked him if I could walk home with him . He gave me a big grin and said he'd be right honored and off we went. That old fella kept me laughing all the way home with talk about the good ole days. He was hilarious and I really had a good time and more importantly I think he did too. Sappy eh? Works for me and in the words of my favorite singer, "I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY."

Well that's it, the first forty-three years of my life. There have been as with everyone's life, ups and downs although I did try to stay up most of the time, down was too depressing. I've had some weird times and then some weirder times. I've made people happy by giving them something to laugh at, usually me and usually quite unintentionally, who else eh? Oh, I'm sorry, were you expecting some fancy dancy finish?

Oh alright, so I didn't go into detail about the men in my life. If you'd had the type of men in your life that I've had in mine you wouldn't want to go into details either but I guess you deserve your money's worth so read on if you must.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: MAKIN WHOOPEE

You ever get that feeling? You know, the fluttering in the stomach, the racing pulse, the rapid heartbeat, that hot and bothered feeling one minute and then that cold, clammy feeling the next and weak especially in the knees? Sounds dreadful eh? Well it's called love. Yeah, yeah I know it sounds like the flu but there is a way to tell the difference. If your arms are wrapped around a dynamic, exciting man it's love. If the only thing your arms are wrapped around is the toilet bowl then it's the flu, simple eh? Of course you can get both at the same time which is a tad confusing or in my case complete chaos.

I met a guy one night while bowling on a league with my parents. His name was Paul. He had red hair, a bushy red beard, gorgeous blue eyes and the worst case of dandruff you've ever seen. We're talkin a regular blizzard. Oh yeah he had a cute tush. Anyway Paul asked my Dad about me. He wanted to know if I was available. Available, now what the heck does that mean? Available for what? Paving his driveway, bakin a cherry pie, uncloggin his sink, playin Monopoly, what? Why can't a guy just be honest and say, "Any chance of she'll let me score?", and we ain't talkin bowling. Anyway Dad told Paul if he wanted to know anything about me he'd have to ask me himself. Atta boy Dad. Well just before we finished bowling Paul came over to talk to me. I just stood there with a bored, haughty look on my face trying not to look interested. Oh alright, I stood there with a stupid grin on my face trying not to slobber and make myself seem any more of a twit than I already was. You wouldn't believe how hard it is to look natural. By the time I left the bowling alley I had a dinner date with Paul for the next night. Be still my heart.

All the way home I was making mental notes for the next day. I was going to get up extra early and wash and set my hair before work. I was going to give myself plenty of time after work to fuss with my hair and war paint and decide what to wear. I was gonna look drop dead gorgeous when Paul came to pick me up come hell or high water. Well I got part of it right when Paul came to pick me up, I looked closer to dropping dead than gorgeous. Murphy had struck yet again, I had the flu. Poor Paul, he didn't know whether to hold me or hand me a barf bucket. Since I obviously wasn't in any shape for dining in or out Paul graciously took my daughter Melissa who was four years old at the time out to dinner instead. I was definitely impressed. Well now I've made my point, I think, whatever it was, oh yeah, if anything is gonna happen it's gonna happen to me. Who else eh? Let's start at the beginning and we'll get back to Paul later on. Will Paul ask Donna out again? Will Donna discover it was really only the flu or was she in love? Will Paul get rid of his dandruff? Don't miss the exciting conclusion.

My first real love was Ernie. Lordy was he something. He had brown curly hair, beautiful brown eyes and a killer smile. He always dressed in black jeans, a black shirt and black shoes. If he'd added a cape to his ensemble, POOF, TA DA, he'd have been a dead ringer for Zorro. He had a real cocky swagger when he walked and most importantly he played guitar and sang. The first time I met him I was twelve and a half years old and I thought he was the answer to a maiden's prayer, this maiden's anyway. Now everyone knows true love never runs smooth, mine did, run I mean, right outta the door. At twelve and a half I was jailbait and Ernie weren't no fool. Even back then I was persistence personified and by the time I was fourteen I considered myself Ernie's girl, sadly however Ernie didn't. He still treated me like I was twelve and a half years old. Of course he was so much older and mature at seventeen, yeah right. Everyone knew girls matured faster than boys, everyone it seems but Ernie. About that time Ernie moved to a town ninety miles to the south. I was heartbroken. It meant I could only pester Ernie to go out

with me on occasional weekends when he came up to visit his parents or ho hum other girlfriends. Oh yeah he had other girlfriends. Sometimes it felt like I was one in a cast of thousands. I wasn't worried though, heck no, I figured if I ever got Ernie to the point of doing the IT thing, you know, the IT thing, the thing parents kept harpin on about, "Don't do IT". Yeah I know parents say don't to a child everyday of their young lives. It's "Don't go away you might get lost," and in the next breath they're telling you to go away and quit botherin em. Or how about, "Don't sit on the seat you might catch something" when your using a public toilet. A snappy comeback like, "I'll stand on the floor and not on the seat, the crabs in there just jump and leap", outta get a reaction or "Crabs pole vault", would do just as well. However as with most snappy comebacks to parents you have to weigh the comeback against how long your gonna be grounded for and decide if the reaction is worth it or not. Ever notice some of the silly don'ts parents use? One's like, "Don't pick your nose you'll poke your eye out", or "Don't swallow your gum you'll get a big wad of it stuck in your stomach and you'll have to drink boiling hot water to melt it", this from the people who are supposed to guide and mold us, uh huh, pretty scary eh? Anyway "Don't do IT", has to be the most frequent phrase used by parents ever. You don't suppose they get free air miles everytime they use it do you? Maybe there's a law that requires all parents to say, "Don't do IT", to their offspring once they hit puberty and there's probably a set quota because "Don't do IT" is repeated over and over and over and over. Talk about gettin a point across. I guess parents figure if they say it often enough it will be imprinted permanently on their poor kid's brain. Of course parents never actually come right out and say what IT is, that your supposed to know already. When parents say, "Don't do IT", its the one time you can bet the farm they ain't using reverse psychology. Just try doin IT and see how fast you buy the farm.

Anyway, I thought once Ernie and I finally got it together he'd be totally blown away by me, uh huh. Considering I'd never done anything more risque than kiss a boy and I didn't have a clue about sex other than snatches of conversation I'd heard between older girls I was pretty full of it, hot air that is. What I'd heard about sex hadn't been real encouragin. For instance, boys liked girls with big bosoms, hooters, headlights, bazongas, whatever you wanna call em. I at fourteen years of age stood five foot four inches and weighed eighty nine pounds soaking wet. I didn't have a big anything except maybe imagination and that wasn't much help cause when it came to sex I didn't know what to imagine. Oh my Mother told me about sex. She said and I quote, "Sex is wonderful after you're married". What the hell was that supposed to mean? It wasn't wonderful before? Well of course it wouldn't be Mom, you'd said "Don't do IT" so much the feelings of guilt about doin IT would take all the fun out of IT.

As I said before Ernie weren't no fool but he did pay some attention to me at times but not that kind of attention if you know what I mean. He really didn't take my efforts seriously until I turned sixteen and blossomed from a little rose bud to a full blown rose, in mind only. As usual my body wasn't co-operating. Just as a point of interest, I removed my training bra (which was too big anyway) when I was twenty-five years old and haven't worn one since, training or otherwise. Besides wearing a bra is a useless endeavour for me at anytime, it keeps slippin up around my neck. I guess you're supposed to have something to hold it in place. Oh well, what would I do with a big set of bosoms anyway? I'd in all likelihood fall flat on my face. There is a bright side, I'll never have to worry about saggin breasts. I could get a little crass about now and repeat some of the things I've heard over the years about small (okay, okay, flat) chested women like, "Anything that doesn't fit in your mouth is a waste anyway", but I won't cause I've got too much class to be crass, heh heh.

Now where was I, oh yeah. Ernie finally started payin some more attention to me. I say some because there was another girl in town he paid a lot of attention to. Boy was I jealous. He even wrote her letters. I never got one letter let alone letters. To make matters worse I knew her and she was a really nice person. It's so hard to hate a nice person. She also had big you-know-whats. However persistence prevailed and the summer before my seventeenth birthday Ernie and I finally got together and I do mean got together. YUK, I'd waited four very long years for that? Boy was I disappointed. They lied, those people who wrote them sexy, romantic novels lied, fireworks indeed. Of course after that fateful night Ernie thought we should do IT every time we were together, well I didn't, think we should or do IT either for that matter, much to Ernie's chagrin. I was in no hurry to make whoopee again. While Ernie's hormones were holdin him hostage mine were on hiatus somewhere and I didn't know their E.T.A. and I didn't particularly care. Reality was starting to seep in. I wasn't the only girl in Ernie's life, the letters to the other girl proved that and one night while Ernie and I were together, not together together but together he slapped me across the face because I said NO. I told you his hormones were holdin him hostage. Boy was he frustrated and I was certainly frustrating. Ernie thought because we had done IT once there was nothin to stop us from doin IT again and again and again. Well he thought wrong. I thought Ernie really cared about me and I was crazy loco over him so I had given him my most valued possession. To put it bluntly, Ernie didn't care about the feelings that went with my gift he only wanted a present that kept giving and giving and giving. Like I said, reality was startin to seep in. Yeah I know, what took so long?

A few months later Ernie walked into the restaurant where I worked and told me he was gettin married in three days time. BUMMER. It seems he'd been playin around not only with me and the other girl he wrote the letters to but with another girl too, like I said a cast of thousands. The another girl had a slight edge over the other girl and me, a Daddy with a double barreled twelve gauge. Yep, the another girl was preggie. Ernie had been given a choice, get hitched or get hit with a load of buckshot from both barrels. Ernie chose gettin hitched, wise choice, I told you he weren't no fool, heh heh. I ran into Ernie a few times over the next couple of years and would you believe he had the nerve to ask me out? Boy did that ever tick me off. Firstly at him because he was nothin but a horny, cattle ranch reject and secondly at myself because I'd been stupid enough to waste four years of my life on him and that ain't no bull. I felt really sorry for the poor girl who'd married Ernie, she got a prize alright, the booby prize. I also got down on my knees and thanked God it wasn't me. You know I saw Ernie and his wife a few months ago, the first time in about twenty-five years. He looked about the same, at least it looked like the same pants and shirt he'd worn twenty some odd years ago and of course he looked older and you know what? I got down on my knees and thanked God again that it wasn't me.

It was while I was on what they call the rebound (Why do they call it rebound. You sure as hell don't bounce right back from something like that, I know.) from my disastrous affair with Ernie that I met Smiley, my future husband. Why we kept dating is beyond me. We didn't have one blessed thing in common. Smiley loved to party. Now I have nothin against partying but not to the point where everyone gets pissy-faced drunk, disgusting and downright rude. Whenever or wherever Smiley partied there was always a fight. I detested violence. Once at a party the booze supply was runnin low, a major disaster to Smiley and his bunch. Smiley's cousin Tubby accidently spilled his drink. These people had a thing for names. Anyway Tubby graciously took the mop and wiped up his spilled drink. I thought, "How mannerly", because so far I'd observed that the men of the family did all the heavy duty stuff like liftin beer bottles, whiskey bottles,

wine bottles etc. The women of the family did the light duty stuff like haulin water from the well, cleanin the house, cookin meals, haulin wood for the stove and anything else the men told them to do. I thought Tubby wipin up his spilled drink showed there was some hope for the men of the family yet. My opinion was reversed right quick when Tubby wrung the contents from the floor mop back into his glass and drank it, OH GROSS, like I said disgusting. To Smiley and his bunch the drinking, partying and fighting were all considered normal behaviour. I on the other hand had never had a whole lot of experience with people who drank. I'd never seen my Dad take a drink although I did hear tell he did one time shortly after him and my Mom got married. It seems Dad's brother who was in the Navy at the time came for a visit. There was a party and Dad got mad or something and chug-a-lugged a water glass full of straight vodka. My Mom's mom walked into the kitchen and found my Dad butterin the washing machine so he could make a cheese sandwich. Apparently grandma turned to my Mom and said, "I knew you'd drive that man to drink". That was the only time I ever heard of Dad takin a drink, no wonder. A little hard on the dental work eh Dad?

Now my Mom did have a drink once in awhile and I will admit she did overindulge occasionally but those times were few and far between. One time when Mom and Dad came home from a dart tournament I heard noises at the window which was located next to the back door of the house. I opened the door and there was my Mom trying to unlock the door by puttin her key in the window. Ever notice how drunk people aren't too bright? "Yeo Mom, over here", I called. Mom staggered through the door just as Dad came striding up the walkway after locking the car. Once inside the door Mom looked at Dad with a stupid grin on her face and said, "Last one in bed is a rotten egg, tee hee", and took off runnin for their bedroom. Once Mom reached the bedroom doorway she made a flyin leap for the bed. Well her body hit the bed and her head hit the headboard, SHMUCK, she was out cold. Dad looked over at me with a silly grin on his face and said, "I think your Mother's been into the hootch". Boy I'll say. So you can see any drinking I'd been exposed to was a once in awhile amusing incident sort of thing and nobody got hurt, well except Mom of course who ended up with one heck of a headache. With Smiley's family it was a regular occurrence. People got hurt, furniture went airborne usually out a window and there were always hard feelings. Now I wasn't against drinking, heck no, I liked to drink but I knew my limit (three drinks max.) and I'd learned through first hand experience the hell of a hangover.

When my twin and I were about fifteen years old Mom and Dad went out for the day. They left before Darlene and I got up. When Darlene and I did get up we headed for the fridge and poured ourselves a big glass of orange juice, you know vitamin C, whatever. The orange juice tasted a little funny but you know by the time we'd finished our glassfuls it tasted pretty good so Darlene and I sat there and polished off the whole pitcher full. The orange juice sure made us feel good, real good. I knew vitamin C was supposed to be good for you but I didn't know it would make you feel that good that fast. I thought Mom had bought a new brand, super improved. Darlene and I were havin a high ole time with high being the operative word. We were laughin over the silliest things, you'd have thought our gigglin pins were loose on our titterin shafts. We were actin more idiotic than usual and we were havin trouble pronouncing certain words. About then Mom called to check on us and to tell us not to drink the orange juice out of the pitcher as it was mixed with vodka. Too late, we were obviously tighter'n a pair of ticks. Needless to say Mom and Dad cut their day out short. Later on that day Darlene and I were the sorriest lookin pair you'd ever seen. Hangovers are HELL. It was like the time I got

caught smoking. I'd blown my seventy-five cent a week allowance on a package of cigarettes and some friends and I had gone up to the bush behind my house to sneak a smoke. My Uncle Carl, you remember him from earlier, the one of dingle ball and whore lure fame, yep him, well anyway he came along and caught me smoking. He told me if I gave him half my package of cigarettes he wouldn't squeal, uh huh. I gave him the half pack of smokes and thought my problem was solved. I thought wrong. After dinner that same evening at which I'd literally pigged out Dad asked me if I'd like a smoke. Uncle Carl had squealed louder than a little fat pig caught in a fence. So much for honour among sneaks. I just sat there trying to look stupid, like I didn't have a clue what Dad was talkin about. I guess I looked guilty as all get out because Dad handed me a big, fat cigar and told me to light up. Well I lit up and started puffin. I actually thought I was gonna get away with it but then again you know what happens when I think and as usual I thought wrong. For a non-smoker Dad caught on real quick and told me to start inhaling. I managed to brazen it out that is until I barfed. Point taken Dad. I was almost tempted to ask Dad what happened to his ole "Waste not, want not" theory he was always goin on about because my dinner was sure wasted but even I wasn't that twitterpaided. It wasn't the right time to bring it up so to speak.

Smiley and I continued dating. Boy I must have really been stuck in stupid mode. After six months of dating Smiley asked me to marry him. Would you believe I said yes? I did, say yes I mean and I did marry him. Now people do some pretty stupid things throughout their lives but you'd have thought I would have taken half an hour off now and again but oh no not me. I worked hard at it, being stupid I mean but I was good at it, look at the results. I ended up married to a drunken, abusive husband who only thought about himself and I was thrown into a lifestyle completely foreign to the way I was raised and I was miserable, totally, thoroughly miserable. I spent eight very long trying years married but it wasn't all for naught, heck no. Although good ole Hubby threw some really wicked curve balls at me I ended up with a pretty fair battin average. No matter how many times Hubby made me feel useless, stupid and inferior I knew deep down it wasn't true. People used to say that any two people could make a marriage work if they tried hard enough. What a crock. What they actually meant was a marriage could survive if the little woman did all the work, kept her mouth shut, didn't think and accepted everything her husband said as law. Yeah right, when donkeys fly.

You know women have been payin for man's weakness since day one. It's true, Eve was blamed for Adam takin a bite outta the apple from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. In the first place did you ever consider Eve ate the apple because she was starving? Good ole Adam was probably a couch potato too busy watchin a rerun of How The Earth Was Created and too lazy to go out and gather food for her. Do you think Eve had to rassle Adam to the ground to get him to take a bite of the apple? Of course not. Adam probably got all bent outta shape because Eve did something for herself and demanded in typical male machoism style that she hand the apple over and Eve being a dutiful wife did so. It's been said that woman was created from one of man's ribs, well take it back, you've been holdin it over our heads ever since.

Throughout the ages a woman's place was beside or behind her man but in the last decade or so a woman's place has been for the most part wherever she wants it to be. There are still a few holdouts but don't worry they're comin round. It's not an easy task wipin out all those thousands of years of claptrap men have been handing us about male superiority but by gum we're doin it. The War of the Roses, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, World War One and World War Two were nothin compared to the battle of the sexes. However with a little sexual allure

here, a little sexual allure there with the occasional come hither look thrown in persistence paid off, big time. Don't give me any bullpucky about women takin advantage of men with their sexual wiles either. Men have used sex as an advantage against women all along so it's only fair that women use their sexuality in retaliation, tit for tat, the difference being that women are a whole lot smarter about it, smarter and subtle. Case and point, have you ever seen a man act all helpless, giggly and dumb to get what he wants? Of course not, he'd be too macho for that. Have you ever seen a man turn on the tears to get his own way? Of course not, he'd be too macho for that. Have you ever seen a man act cute, coy and absolutely adorable to get someone's attention? Of course not, he'd be too macho for that. I rest my case. You know what? Women use all the above and then some and it works. It works real well. Women get what they want. If none of the above works then you've only got one recourse. Stick your bottom lip out, just a little and sniff daintily while whisperin sweet nonsense in his ear. A little tear or two runnin down your cheek doesn't hurt either. Ta da, you've got your way. It's simple, you make their male machoism work for you. Men will do just about anything to please a weak, helpless little lady especially if he thinks it sets off his macho male image. You see men know women are doing it just to get their own way, I mean they would have to wouldn't they, they're not that dense are they, naw they couldn't be, anyway they let us have our own way because it enhances their image but the point is we know why they're doing it but they don't know we know. By the way, if none of the above work then run like hell honey, the critter ain't human.

Don't get me wrong, I believe men and women are equals. I'm just pointing out that men are too macho to admit it. We woman don't want to hear anymore sexist jokes like, "What do a hurricane, a tornado and a woman have in common?" Answer: "One way or another they're gonna get your house". Hardee-har-har, very funny. Now listen all you men - WOMEN ARE YOUR EQUALS - make love not war, it's definitely more fun and a whole lot more satisfying. All women want is to recognized as the outstanding individuals we are, heh heh.

Darn, I got lost again, oh yeah, I ended my marriage cause I realized if I was strong enough to withstand my tyrannical husband then I was strong enough to make it on my own. See I told you my marriage wasn't for naught, I learned just how strong a person I was. Boy, there had to have been an easier way. By the way, you know how the bible says Moses parted the Dead, Red or whatever Sea? Well I'll bet if there'd been a Mosetta she'd have done it just as well. Sorry, couldn't help myself, I just had to put that in. Anyway, now I was a single woman with my child to raise.

Now back to Paul, remember him? Yep that's him, the flaky one. You know even his bushy beard had dandruff. After our ill- fated first date Paul actually asked me out again. I must have made one hell of a first impression on him because my second was no hell, remember, I had the flu? Our second date I'm happy to say was a whole lot better. Paul and I went to a dance with his cousin. I had to pick Paul and his cousin up in my Dad's ole plumbin truck because Paul had a slight run in with the law and no longer possessed a valid driver's licence but no matter we went to the dance and had a great time. Both Paul and I loved to dance. There was one slightly awkward bit. Paul and his cousin got up on stage and sang, "Oh Donna" to me in front of everybody. I was thrilled, I'd have been even more thrilled if either one of them could have sung on key but I guess it's the thought that counted. They sounded like a pair of wounded weasels on wacky weed.

When I drove Paul home after the dance I invited him to dinner the next night at my parent's house where I lived and he accepted my invitation. I was on cloud nine. Paul was just what my

poor shattered ego needed. Let's face it, between Ernie and good ole Hubby my ego had takin a pretty bad beatin. When Paul came for dinner the next night which incidently I cooked myself, my family acted up. Paul's last name was LaFleur and he was french. My Dad kept callin him LaFluery and sayin, "Hullo dis is me, ess dat you?" in a really awful supposedly french accent. Mom filled Paul in on every stupid, embarrassing thing I'd ever done in my life and my kid sister kept puttin me down because she was mad at me for inadvertantly destroying her pot plants that morning. Pot as in marijuana. The fact they were illegal made no never mind. My kid sister and I had a lot of arguments about illegal substances when she was younger. One year for Christmas my present from her was wrapped up to look like a gigantic joint. The present turned out to be a tee shirt with "Just Say No" printed in big letters across the front of it. I often wondered where she got her sense of humour from, heh heh. I'm happy to say my sister got through that stage with no lasting ill effects or criminal charges, WHEW, it was close at times.

Anyway, during dinner I mentioned during the conversation that I wished Mom and Dad would buy some pork chops once in awhile. Mom and Dad had never been overly fond of pork but I loved pork chops. I said something to the effect that I'd do anything for a pork chop as I hadn't had one for a long time. Boy-oh-boy, I just craved a piece of ole dead pig. The conversation went from food to something else and I forgot about it. Mom and Dad liked Paul so before he went home they issued a dinner invitation for the next evening as well which Paul accepted.

When I got home from work the next afternoon I rushed around to get all gussied up before Paul arrived. I needn't have worried, Paul was late and showed up just as we were sitting down to dinner. I was flabbergasted when Paul walked into the kitchen, plopped two pork chops on my plate and said in an exaggerated sexy voice, "You said you'd do anything for a pork chop so here's two of em". My family cracked up. I went from slightly pink to candy apple red. All through dinner my family poured it on til it slopped over. To say I was embarrassed would have definitely been a gross understatement. Mortified came closer. I never did learn to think before I spoke and I still haven't. Spontaneity is nice, well interesting anyway, well sometimes, oh hell who am I trying to kid, it always gets me in trouble.

Paul and I continued to date. We saw each other every day. When I got my first speeding ticket (remember I told you about it earlier) well Paul was the guy who gave me the turtle earrings as a symbol of how I should be driving and a card congratulating me on my first speeding ticket. On our one month anniversary Paul gave me a bottle of my favorite perfume. Paul was a super guy. He was kind, gentle, attentive and patient. Boy was he patient. You see Paul lived with his parents and I lived with my parents. It was a question of economics. Neither one of us could afford to live elsewhere. Needless to say any thought of being intimate together was just that, a thought, anything else was out of the question.

After we'd been dating for about three months Paul rented a motel room for us one night. Paul told his folks he was spending the night at my house and I told my folks I was spending the night at Paul's house. I thought we were finally going to be together, uh huh, you know what happens when I think. I was so nervous about being in a motel room and I felt so guilty about lying to my parents that I just couldn't get in the mood so nothin happened, absolutely nothin.

After we'd been dating for about six months Paul came to dinner and announced to my family

he was takin me to an out of town bowling tournament two weeks hence. Paul had a habit of making surprise announcements like that at my folks dinner table and I was usually the one surprised. Oh well I thought, Paul and I are finally going to have a chance to be together. We'd be hundreds of miles away from home in a strange city where no-one knew us. You see my parents had done their job real well. Even though I was a divorced woman I didn't feel right about "Doin It" with a man I wasn't married to and I certainly didn't want my parents to know. I doubt very much my folks would have said anything but I didn't want them to know in case they might think less of me. Aw come on nobody's perfect and besides you know what happens when I think. Anyway I was real excited about takin the trip with Paul to the bowling tournament and the other. For some reason I thought if I was in another city far away from my parents it would be okay to fool around, yeah right, like my parents were really that stupid. The two weeks till we left seemed to pass sooo slowly but finally the big day arrived.

Paul and I were riding with another couple who were older but sure didn't act their age. The trip down was a riot. When we reached our destination Paul registered us at the motel where he'd made reservations and then took me out for a nice romantic dinner. During dinner and on the way back to the motel Paul's hormones were on full alert. They must have been because he kept whisperin the most shocking albeit exciting things in my ear about what was gonna happen once we got back in our room at the motel. Paul had never talked like that before at least not to me. I remember thinking that I'd been right and that gettin outta town to be together for the first time was the perfect solution as we were away from our families and all those pesky inhibitions that kept croppin up at home just seemed to have disappeared. Well you know what happens when I think, Murphy's Law kicks in and this time he kicked in like a mule with a real ugly on. As we walked up to our motel room door the door to the room beside ours opened and out stepped my Dad. I got all red and flabbergasted and stammered, "Daa-d what are you doin here?" Dad just smiled and said, "Surprise, I'm here for the bowling tournament". Boy talk about an instantaneous mood swing. I went from all hot and bothered to a puritanical nervous Nellie in the blink of an eye. As you can tell I got an early start at perfecting the fine art of mood swings. You know what they say, "Practice makes perfect", and I guess I wanted to be real good at it by the time I started goin through the "CHANGE". I'm one of those people who like to do well at whatever I'm doin no matter what it is, heh heh. Well here I was in another fine mess, as usual. Poor Paul and I had been goin together for six months without being together together, we finally have the ideal situation in which to be together and what happens, Dad happens that's what. Needless to say nothin happened, absolutely nothin, zero, zip, zilch. However it was a fun weekend anyway except for you know, well excuse me but I just couldn't not with dear ole Dad right in the next room. Now Paul he must have had the patience of a saint and a lot more than I'll ever acquire even if I live to be an octogenarian. Most other guys would have been long gone but not Paul, he hung in there like a dirty shirt.

About two weeks after our weekend away Paul made another one of his surprise announcements at my parent's dinner table. Damn he could be annoying. Anyway Paul announced that him and I were gettin our own apartment together. I as usual didn't know a thing about it. Now I don't know about you but I like to sort of have a say in matters like that. It would've been nice or at the very least more polite if Paul had of asked me first if I even wanted to share an apartment with him. I mean I did but that wasn't the point.

Before very long Paul and I were co-habitating in a small but nice apartment at the other end of the city from my parents. I decided to overlook Paul's annoying little habit of making

decisions without my valuable input because he really was a super guy, uh huh. A month after Paul and I moved into our apartment I went to visit my sister for a weekend and when I returned home Paul had moved out, lock, stock and bowling ball. He didn't just move out of the apartment he had moved clear across the country to British Columbia. In the note he'd left Paul told me he'd decided to look up an old flame who he was still in love with and he meant no offense to me, well whoopee. That sure made me feel a whole lot better, NOT. You know I should have known better. After all a guy with four ex-wives and a passel of offspring runnin around doesn't exactly have a lot of stayin power. I didn't want to stay in the apartment without Paul so I (no I didn't move back in with the folks) I managed to rent a cute little house right across the road from my folks who by the way were very sympathetic and supportive. Not one person said, "I told you so". Boy I really must of looked pathetic. Just as a point of interest Paul as far as I know never did get rid of his dandruff of course I've never seen him again so I don't know for sure and quite frankly I don't give a darn.

There's an old saying that goes something like, "Once bitten, twice shy", well that wasn't me they were talkin about. Did I learn from my experiences, obviously not enough, heck no, I couldn't have because I jumped right back in with both feet after a suitable time of mournful self pity of course. I got tangled up with my son Robbie's father, Rags. Yeah you remember I mentioned him earlier on as well as my ex-hubby. I didn't show good ole ex- hubby in any better light than previously mentioned and Rags ain't gonna do a whole lot better either. Rags was fun and everybody needs fun in their life however there really can be too much of a good thing. It's just like candy, it tastes really good and you really enjoy eating it but if you eat too much your gonna upchuck and feel really rotten. Well that's what happened with my relationship with Rags. No I didn't cough up my cookies but if your a parent and you've got a child depending on you then you do have to be responsible and make sure your child has food to eat, a warm and comfortable home and most importantly you have to just be there for them. Rags made us laugh but if there was a crisis he was outta there. He depended on me for everything just like my daughter. He expected me to keep his stomach full, a roof over his head and be there whenever he needed me. After five years I got a tad resentful. What about what I wanted and who was there for me when I needed someone, nobody that's who.

Rags never contributed to expenses, I had to work and worry about all the mundane things like paying the rent, buying groceries, cutting the grass and most importantly supplying beer money. Boy lookin back I'd say entertainment was a little pricy back then wouldn't you? When I think about the mental and monetary payouts I made during my relationship with Rags I really could upchuck. To give you an idea of just how irresponsible Rags was I remember one time I got a phone call that went something like this:

Caller: Could I speak to Donna please?

Me: This is Donna speaking.

Caller: I'm calling from the district jail and I'm calling to inform you that we have Rags as our guest for the next week.

Me: Would you mind tellin me why Rags is a guest there?

Caller: Rags was arrested for shoplifting at the grocery store at the Mall.

Me: Did you arrest our dog too?

Caller: I beg your pardon?

Me: Did you arrest our dog too? Rags had our dog with him. Where is the dog?

Caller: Just hang on, I'll check.

After about ten minutes the caller came back on the line and told me the dog was tied to the bicycle stand outside the grocery store. Nice, real nice, it was pouring rain and I had to walk all the way over to the mall and rescue our poor dog. Some people just have no consideration and Rags was definitely one of them. When I got to the Mall, One Foot In Hawaii, (Rags was responsible for naming the dog) was so glad to see me he jumped up on me and sent me flying right into a big puddle on my tushie. Although memorable it wasn't one of my better days.

When Rags did work which wasn't very often and he'd get paid he would go down the list he kept of people he'd borrowed beer money from and pay them back. Those people were always his first priority come pay back time. Never mind where I was on the list, you don't want to know. Suffice it to say that Rags never got far enough down on the list to pay me back. You know when I first started seeing Rags he'd got charged three times in one day for driving while under the influence and to top it off he was the worst driver I'd ever seen, drunk or sober. I guess you could say I wasn't very good at reading the little signals that tell you what a person is really like. Okay, okay, I thought my lovin influence would change him, uh huh, wrong again. I remember one time just after I started dating Rags, we were at a party and Rags started singing, "I'm a little teapot short and stout, here is my handle here is my-", at this point Rags looked down at his hands which were placed one on each hip and said, "Oh damn, I'm the sugar bowl". I thought he was hilarious and so did everyone else

After puttin up with Rags for almost five years I literally threw in the towel and him the heck out. I didn't need to get hit in the head by no barn door to realize it was never gonna work out, heck no, it took the entire barn. The one really good thing that came out of my relationship with Rags was my son Robbie. Robbie is loving, smart, a lot of fun and more responsible at nine years of age than his father will ever be in his lifetime. Robbie has met his father on occasion and he's not real impressed. I've never stopped Rags from seeing his son but I did stipulate that he must be sober when he comes to see him. Needless to say he doesn't come around much, hardly ever, but Robbie is happy and well adjusted and that's all that really counts.

After Rags I steered clear of any serious involvement with anyone for quite a while, which was fine in one way but a tad embarrassing in another. You see after the birth of my son I started having a few female problems and had to go to a gynecologist. Now if there is one person you have to be completely honest with it's your gynecologist. At the doctor's office I was givin a set of detailed questionnaires to fill out and some of the questions were real red facers, especially the one about how frequently I engaged in having sex. I put down my answer and handed the forms back to the nurse. When the doctor showed me into his examining room he sat down and started looking over the questionnaire I'd filled out. He asked me to clarify certain things about my medical history and then he got to the how often I had sex question.

Doctor: It says here you have sex once. Is that once a week or once a month?

Me: Er, that's once in a year and a half. Boy talk about being embarrassed. The doctor just looked at me and said, "I'm not gonna touch that one".

I didn't believe in having sex with someone unless I was committed to that person, in other words I didn't believe in recreational sex and I still don't even in this highly enlightened day and age. My gynecologist was a super guy but he did have a habit of making the most unexpected comments like the time I went for my six week checkup after having Robbie. There I was layin on the examining table all exposed and he walked in took one look and said, "Boy your ole boobs sure took a beaten, didn't they?" I kid you not. Later during my examination he commented on a surgical scar I had, "Oh well, a man on a gallopin horse on a dark night would never notice it

anyway", he said. Like I said his comments were always unexpected but humorous. I think the comment I got the biggest kick out of was when he was doing an examination and makin small talk and I was tellin him about how I'd bought a piano. The conversation went something like this;

Doctor: Do you play the piano?

Me: No but I bought a how to book and I'm gonna try and learn.

Doctor: Well I'm sorry but I think we're gonna have to do a hysterectomy.

Me: Oh no, is it really necessary?

Doctor: Yes it is and besides I need the money, I've got ten children to support.

Me: Everybody needs money, me included.

Doctor: You just bought a piano.

Me: But it was a used piano.

Doctor: Well so's your uterus.

I continued to steer clear of any relationships for quite a while, three years to be exact but then along came Percy. Percy was something else but then again aren't they all at first? Percy was from British Columbia and was visiting his sister who was my next door neighbor. He was divorced and had his son living with him who was just a little younger than my daughter. Percy was a really kind person. He had twinklin blue eyes, red hair and he wasn't bad lookin, not bad at all. Anyway we started dating and I enjoyed Percy's company. Let's face it, after three years I was lonely as hell so I guess what happened was mostly my fault. Percy told me right at the start that we couldn't get too involved as he was only going to be here for a month and then he would be headin home to British Columbia and he didn't believe in long distance romance.

It felt so good to have somebody payin attention to me. Someone that is who didn't want his diaper changed or someone who didn't want an increase in her allowance. Percy took me on an overnight campin trip with friends of his, out of town for a weekend on another friend's motorcycle and swimming at a relative's house where there was a pool. I thought things were goin great but then you know what happens when I think, uh huh.

One night Percy's sister was gettin ready to go to a dance and I was sure Percy would ask me to accompany him to the dance when he got back from wherever he was at. When Percy drove into his sister's driveway I just happened to be lookin out the window, oh alright so I was watchin for him. Anyway when he pulled in he wasn't alone, he had a girl with him, his date for the dance. I was some upset. Here I'd entertained visions of Percy wantin to continue our relationship when he went back to British Columbia and visualized me finally getting to see what the other part of the country looked like when I went out to visit him and he has the audacity to show up with another woman. Despite Percy's warning of not getting involved and not believing in long distance romances and the fact he never actually led me to believe any different I think he had a hell of a nerve showin up with a woman he was takin to a dance that he'd never asked me to attend in the first place, don't you?

I did the only thing I could do, I didn't go anywhere near Percy's sister's house whenever Percy was there, that good an actress I wasn't. I couldn't just sit there and pretend like nothin happened, no way, besides I have one of those readable faces and I did have my pride to consider, what little there was left. Finally Percy left to go home and things slowly returned to normal, well almost. Aw come on I had to give it one final shot didn't I? Wouldn't you, never mind, I know I know, some people know when to quit. Anyway I wrote a poem and had it along with three roses delivered to Percy after he got home. One rose was pink, one rose was red, one rose was yellow

and the poem went like this:

Yellow is for friendship may ours always be, Even though you live far away in B.C., Pink is for caring and gentleness they say, So smile Percy and have a nice day, Red is for the love that special people share, I think you're special Percy and I really do care.

Damn it was good but not good enough because all I got from Percy was a polite thank you and an acute case of embarrassment from the reaction of the people at the flower shop where I went to order the flowers. "Oh come here you just have to read this, it's so sweet", the saleslady called to all her fellow workers. Yeah right lady, why not just take out a full page advertisement in the local newspaper, boy talk about centerin a person out. Although my little poem didn't do much for Percy it did become quite popular and people actually paid me for lettin em use it to help their love life. So you see I did get something out of my relationship with Percy, MONEY, okay, okay, so maybe it was a teeny bit pathetic but at least it was something. Wouldn't you choose profit after a loss?

After Percy came Ron, you know the mining man. The man who had the wife and kidlets he forgot to tell me about. I told you earlier just about all there was to know about him except that I heard recently that he's out of jail now, too bad, heh heh.

Pete was the last man in my life and I haven't gone out with anyone steady since. Pete was french canadian and was a dead ringer for Kris Kristofferson, yeah I know, WOW. Anyway Pete was a friend of Ron's and when I broke up with Ron I called Pete and invited him out for a drink and he accepted. Pete and I went out for a few drinks and ended up necking in his truck in the parking lot of one of the local hotels. There I was, a thirty-something aged woman sitting necking in a truck like I was a teenager, damn it was fun. Anyway Pete drove a transport for a living and whenever he was home we'd go out. He was quiet and shy and a lot of fun to be with. Pete really treated my children nicely and of course that impressed the hell outta me. Love me love my kids or back off bozo was my philosophy. Just after Pete and I started dating I caught an awful cold. As I was gettin ready to walk Robbie out to catch the school bus this one day I was feelin pretty sorry for myself. I was sicker than a dog with my cold and I was gonna have to stand in the pouring rain with Robbie till his bus came. Would you believe Pete showed up to drive us, he did, I was dumfounded, I couldn't believe how considerate he was and that's not all. Pete gave me a card that said I was a lot of fun to be with and that I was gettin easier to love everyday. Now I may not be the sharpest pencil in the pencil case especially when it comes to men but wouldn't you have been impressed? Boy I sure was.

Pete and I continued to date, he bought a trailer and took Robbie and I camping which was a novel experience. Suffice it to say that I'll never and I do mean never go camping again unless it's in a trailer equipped with a full size bathroom and a kitchen completely separate from the sleeping quarters. The trailer Pete bought was so small you had to go outside to turnaround. Well maybe it wasn't quite that bad but it was bad enough. The table converted to the bed we slept in so the decision to go to bed had to be mutual which it usually wasn't. Pete liked to stay up later than I did. That also caused problems in the morning because I was an early riser and of course Pete wasn't. That meant I'd get up and have to sit outside so I wouldn't disturb Pete's sleep. Many times I bit back the urge to tell Pete if he went to bed earlier at night he'd get up earlier in the morning but I kept quiet because I realized that no two people are totally compatible and into each life a little rain must fall, literally. I was not impressed.

Now correct me if I'm wrong but my idea of camping means eating hot dogs, hamburgers, canned beans and the like, you know easy stuff. Pete expected to eat like he did at home, meat and potatoes and the whole bit which didn't impress me much either. Cooking while camping was a whole lot harder than at home. At least at home you had four burners and an oven that worked with the flip of a switch. Did you ever try cookin a full course meal on one of those two burner little gas thingys, talk about frustrating. I'd always thought camping was supposed to be a laid-back sort of recreation but heck what do I know? I know I don't like camping that's what.

Pete's personal vehicle was a little jeep. It was so cute. Naturally Pete was one of those I'm the man and I'll do the driving sort of person which was fine with me. You see good ole ex-hubby had always put me down for the way I drove a vehicle because it wasn't the same way he drove and just for the record my way was the right way. Anyway I was a tad nervous about driving another person's vehicle especially if that other person was in it. After goin with Pete for almost a year Pete decided to let me use his jeep while he was away on the road doin his truck drivin thing since I didn't have a car of my own. Now this suited me just fine, well almost. I would go with Pete to the yard when he went to get his truck and I would drive the jeep home after he left. When Pete would return I would drive the jeep to the yard and Pete would drive me back home. In other words I never had to drive while Pete was in the vehicle. That was the fine part. The not so fine part was I was always on edge whenever I was driving Pete's jeep in case something happened. I knew what I was doin but it was all them other yahoos on the road that worried me. The jeep was Pete's pride and joy and I swear if anything had ever of happened to it while it was entrusted to my care I would have simply left town, quickly, quietly and permanently. Another not so fine was the fact that Pete was quite a bit taller than me and he didn't like me to move the seat ahead in the jeep while I was drivin. He said he couldn't get it back again in the exact spot where he liked it. Picky, picky, which meant that I always drove sort of perched on the edge of the seat so I could reach the pedals. I always felt like a kid just learnin to drive.

Well finally the day came that I had to drive with Pete in the jeep. I went to pick up Pete at the yard. Now usually I ended up sittin there for awhile as Pete would always have paper work to finish and I'd always slide over to the passenger seat before he got into the jeep. Well this time when I pulled in he was right there waitin and jumped into the passenger seat almost before I'd stopped. When I asked him why he didn't want to drive he said he'd been on the road six days straight and he was just too tired. Boy was I nervous. All the way back to my house I kept tellin myself mentally, whatever you do don't ride the clutch, don't jerk the jeep when changin gears, don't speed, I was a nervous wreck, I kept waitin for Pete to tell me I wasn't doin something right. Pete never said one word. When I pulled in at my place I turned to Pete and said, "Well?". Pete looked at me and said , "Well what?".

"How did I do drivin the jeep?", I asked.

"Oh, alright I guess I wasn't paying any attention", he answered.

Nice, real nice, I'd been a nervous wreck for nothin, oh well, at least I didn't get yelled at.

Speakin of drivin, that's how I found out Pete was the jealous type. You see there was this friend of mine, his name was Arnold. Now Arnold and I had been friends, good friends for years. Well Arnold and his wife were separating and Arnold was moving to a city a few hundred kilometers to the south. Arnold was renting a truck to move his belongings and he asked me to go with him so I could drive the truck back to North Bay and the rental place. You have to understand that I placed a very high value on Arnold's friendship. Throughout the years Arnold

was always there for me no matter what. Arnold was the one who encouraged me to go back to school and get my degree in journalism. When I needed to just get away and have a little break from things Arnold would show up with a bus ticket to wherever, like the time he took the time to do so the night before he got married. I had recently discovered I was pregnant with Robbie and I badly needed a break. Arnold left his bachelor party to bring bus tickets for my daughter and I to go to visit my sister for the weekend. He also drove us to the bus station. Now that's a friend. One year on my birthday Arnold showed up with a bag of my favorite kind of meat which I couldn't have afforded to buy for myself. While I was pregnant with Robbie, Arnold lent me the money to pay off all my bills so I wouldn't have that to worry about because being a single parent and pregnant was worry enough. I think the one thing that stood out most of all the things Arnold did for me was the time I lent a girl I worked with some money so she could buy food to feed her four kids. It turned out the girl lied and she and her husband had used the money to buy a pound of marijuana to divide into ounces to resell and make a profit. My faith in my fellow man was shattered and not just because I was lied to but because they never paid me back. I was depressed over it for months. I just couldn't believe they'd taken advantage of me like that. Months later I got a telephone call from the aunt of the girl I'd lent the money to who by the way had relocated out of the province. The aunt asked me to drop by as she had gotten a letter from her niece and enclosed in the letter was all the money I had lent her which she wanted her aunt to give to me. I was so happy, my faith in my fellow man was restored. A couple of years later I found out quite by accident that it had been Arnold who had paid me back the money. He had gone to the girl's aunt and given her the money and instructed her to tell me it was from her niece. Now that is a true blue friend. Arnold to this day doesn't know I know but since I plan to give him an autographed copy of this book I guess he'll know I know. Thank you dear, dear friend.

Where was I? Oh yeah, well Arnold had asked me to help him move so I did. Pete wasn't real happy about it and he didn't seem to buy my explanation about what a good friend Arnold was and that I wanted to help. I even asked Pete to come along as he wasn't working that day but he refused. I had thought Arnold was renting a half or one ton truck but then you know what happens when I think, uh huh, it was a big truck with a bunch of gears in low and another bunch in high, OH DARN. It took Arnold and I most of the morning to load his belongings into the truck and then we headed down the highway with Arnold doin the honors behind the wheel. About halfway to our destination Arnold pulled over so we could make a personal pit stop, a person's bladder will only hold so much you know and I suggested to Arnold that I take over the drivin as I would need a little practice behind the wheel before I attempted the trip home by my lonesome. I did pretty darn good considerin at this point in my life I'd never driven anything larger than a one ton truck.

We started unloadin the truck immediately upon reaching our destination but it was after six p.m. before we finished. I was just a tad tired but kind of excited too about drivin that big sucker of a truck all the way home by myself. I just loved a challenge especially if it had anything to do with drivin. I left for home at about 6:30 p.m. Since it was November the chances of runnin into inclement weather were pretty high so Arnold cautioned me that if the weather turned nasty to stop at a motel for the night and gave me his credit card just in case. Since we hadn't had the first fall of snow for the season as yet I figured I'd be all right. Well as luck would have it, my luck that is the weather did indeed turn nasty, real nasty, so I said to my self, "Self, what are you gonna do? Pete is waitin for you at home and he wasn't real pleased with you for goin in the first

place so if you spend the night in a motel using Arnold's credit card he's gonna be even less happy. On the other hand Pete surely wouldn't expect me to risk life and limb drivin this truck home especially since I'm not even sure if I know what I'm doin. I wonder if I'm supposed to be in high or low range? Oh well I've been in high and it's got me this far so high it stays". Meanwhile the snow was falling even heavier and there were cars sliding into the ditch all around me. I had to make a decision and I had to make it soon. I decided to keep goin. Although the thought of Pete being less than pleased with me goin in the first place may have played some small part in my decision to keep on truckin it was the feelin of exhilaration I got from pitting myself and the truck against the elements and the other guys, you know the ones that kept slidin into the ditch that did it for me. Hot damn, what a rush. I loved it.

When I finally pulled into the parking lot at my place hours later it was to find that the truck was too big to park in my alloted parking space although I'll have you know I backed that sucker up like a pro tryin to make it fit. There was nothin else for it, I'd have to return the truck to the rental place that night instead of waitin till the next morning as previously planned. The only problem was how I was gonna get home after I dropped the truck off. I called Pete's apartment and prayed he'd got over his hissy fit, he had somewhat but he was still sulky. I drove the truck to the rental place and within a few minutes Pete showed up to drive me home. You should have seen the look of Kodak moment astonishment on Pete's face when he saw the truck I'd been drivin. Blew him away, totally. Now it was time to teach Pete a little lesson. When Pete asked me why I didn't tell him what size truck I'd be drivin I told him I hadn't known myself but I reminded him that I had asked him to accompany me and that if he had he could have done the drivin at which he was an expert and I wouldn't have had to struggle to get home to him, drivin such a big ole truck in a blinding snow storm risking life and limb. Heh heh, got him. You know a little dose of guilt never hurt anyone especially if it makes someone feel bad for bein mad at you in the first place when they didn't have any reason to be angry to begin with. I didn't mention Arnold's credit card, I weren't no fool.

After Pete and I had been goin together for over a year I asked him to move in with me. I figured why not, we got along well and I thought we could handle any problems that arose. Yeah you know, I thought wrong and it didn't take me long to discover a side of Pete that had previously been inconspicuous. First off I had a medical condition called a hiatus hernia which simply put meant the acid from my stomach would go up into my esophagus and cause me to suffer very severe pain as in, "Oh God, I'm dyin", chest pains. As a matter of fact the first time I'd had an attack the pain had been so severe I'd ended up in the hospital in the cardiac care unit because my heart had gone out of rhythm or somethin. SCARIOS boy. It was kinda funny really because I'd started havin chest pains the night before and I tried to ignore them but by six a.m. the next mornin I couldn't ignore them any longer and I called my Mom to come drive me to the hospital. My Mother may be a lot of things but she is definitely not a morning person, she bitched and yelled at me all the way to the hospital. You never and I do mean never disturb Mom in the morning before she's had her coffee. When we got to the hospital Mom dropped me off and headed back for home and her caffeine fix with parting words of, "Call me when your ready to come home", which she said in her bitchiest tone of voice.

I wasn't in the hospital more than five minutes before a nurse had me hooked up to a heart thingy. When the doctor on call came in to see me he explained what had happened and told me I was being sent up to the cardiac unit. I was a tad apprehensive by what was goin on, okay,

okay, I was scared stiff and I asked if I could call my Mom. Instead of lettin me get up to place the call they brought a phone right to me on my stretcher in the emergency room, the fact they wouldn't even let me get up to make the call scared me even more.

Mom: Hello?

Me: Hi Mom, It's me.

Mom: Are you ready to come home? What was the problem?

Boy what a difference a little cup of coffee makes eh?

Me: Well not exactly Mom, they're gonna admit me and send me up to the cardiac care unit.

Mom: What! What's wrong?

Me: I'm not sure Mom, could you come up?

Mom: I'll be right there.

What happened next was a little fuzzy as the nurse gave me a shot of something and before I knew what hit me I was out for the count. When I woke up my Dad and my twin Darlene were standing beside my bed in the cardiac unit. Now you have to understand that my Dad always wore his work clothes during the week and only donned his good clothes on the weekends if he wasn't working. It was the middle of the week and instead of being at work my Dad was standing there in his good clothes. Darlene very seldom travelled the ninety miles up to where I lived so seeing her standing there with Dad was a double shock. My first thought was, "Holy !#%* am I dyin?" NOT, thank heavens although just the fact Dad and Darlene standin there was enough to give me a heart attack.

Just jokingly I told Dad about Mom givin me a hard time on the way to the hospital and Darlene told me later that he really tore a strip off Mom over it with words to the effect, "She's havin a heart attack and your yellin at her". I knew Mom didn't really mean it and I thought it was funny at least I did after the doctor assured me that one more clean shirt wasn't all I needed. I spent a week in the hospital and found out my heart was fine and the doctor prescribed some medicine to keep my stomach acid under control so I wouldn't have a repeat performance. I know, what does all this have to do with Pete, well hold onto your britches I'm gettin to it. Sheesh, give me a break, I'm tryin to set the scene here.

Pete stayed at my place the night before he moved in with me. He wasn't feelin too well and he was havin trouble sleeping so he took a sleeping pill before we went to bed. A couple of hours later I had one of my stomach attacks so I quietly slipped out of bed and went downstairs so I wouldn't disturb Pete after all there was nothin he could do to help and besides I was quite used to lookin after myself and had the routine down pat. I took a pill, made myself a glass of warm milk and sat down to watch television until the pill took effect and I could return to bed. You see during an attack I couldn't lay down because that made the pain a lot worse, I either had to sit or stand until the pill took effect. I had only been watchin television for about twenty minutes when Pete came downstairs, he was fully dressed and in one hell of a hissy fit. He put his boots on and opened the front door. I ran into the hallway, grabbed his arm and asked him what was wrong. He looked at me with pure rage and said, "If I'd wanted to sleep alone I could have stayed at my own place", for a minute I actually thought he was gonna hit me but instead he walked out the door, got in his jeep and drove off. I was stunned.

All the next morning I waited for Pete to call after all he was supposed to be moving in that day. Shortly before noon Pete finally called and said we had to talk. Well we talked. I tried to explain to Pete that I hadn't wanted to wake him up when I had my attack as I knew he hadn't been sleeping well and he'd taken a sleeping pill so he could sleep so why wake him up when

there was nothin he could have done to help anyway. Pete wouldn't buy it, not for a New York minute. Finally, after I was in tears Pete relented and dropped the whole thing and forgave me. Big of him huh? I should have realized right there and then that he was the type who was always right no matter how wrong he was. Pete moved in and life went on and on and on. At first it wasn't too bad because Pete was away truckin a lot but then an old injury from a truckin accident years earlier flared up and Pete was home to stay, whoopee.

As near as I can figure out Pete grew up in a family where the man of the house reigned and ruled. While he went out to work to support his family the little woman looked after the youngins, cleaned the house, cooked the meals, mended the clothes, grew and canned vegetables and did everything her husband told her too. Any major decisions were made by the man of the house and his word was law. How charming, it rated right on up there with the ole, "Pregnant in the summer and barefoot in the winter", theory.

Life with Pete was good at times and I tried to hang onto those good times when times weren't so good. Pete was the one who encouraged me to try for the job drivin a school bus and when I had to go into the hospital to have an operation Pete was fantastic. I'd spent two weeks prior to the surgery cookin casseroles and the like and baking stuff to put in the freezer so that when I came home after the operation I wouldn't have to strain myself cookin. For dinner I'd just have to open the freezer, take something out to heat up in the oven for dinner and something to thaw out for dessert. When I got home from the hospital Pete wouldn't even let me do that. He insisted on ordering something in every night. He was kind, considerate and very caring.

I don't know exactly when things started changing but change they did. Maybe it was when I got the job with transit. Pete never said much but I got the feeling he resented the fact they'd hired me when he a much more experienced driver had been trying to get on with them for years. Ever so slowly over a period of a couple of years things changed and not for the better. Pete seemed to resent the time I spent doin things for my kids and he expected me to agree with him no matter what whether it was how I disciplined the kids or something simple like when to eat breakfast.

When I worked for transit I did a lot of split shifts. For instance, I'd go do three or four college overload runs first thing in the morning which usually meant starting work around seven a.m. then be on call for the rest of the day. I'd go home after completing the college runs, which was usually around nine a.m., make breakfast for Pete and I and then work around the house so I'd be available in case I got called back in to drive more runs. Here's where Pete had a real problem. Pete usually didn't want to eat until eleven a.m. or even later and he thought I should wait to eat until he was ready to eat. Well that was all well and good in theory but in actuality it meant if I got called back into work before Pete was ready to eat then I didn't get to eat and believe me it happened more times than I can count. Somedays I didn't get a thing to eat from suppertime the night before until six p.m. or sometimes even later the next day. Now you'd think Pete would've realized just how ridiculous his insistence that I wait to eat with him was but oh no, not him. If I didn't wait to eat with him he'd sulk. I kid you not and he was good at it because I always ended up being the one to give in. He'd give me the silent treatment and wouldn't have a thing to do with me until he got his own way.

Another thing that really ticked me off was that Pete was home all day while I was out working and he never lifted one finger to help around the house. Pete did pay his share of living expenses but I don't think it would have hurt him to pick up a dust cloth once in awhile after all he had nothin better to do and I certainly would have been most appreciative. He expected me to

work, keep the house clean, the laundry done, roll cigarettes for both of us, cook the meals and if I was gonna be working at dinnertime to leave something ready that just had to be heated up. Needless to say I got very resentful and just plum tired out. Pete did however look after Robbie while I was working which saved me having to pay a babysitter but even that had it's drawbacks because I thought Pete was much too strict with Robbie. Of course that's probably how Pete himself was raised so I guess that's how he thought it should be done. Well I wasn't raised that way and I liked my way better, so by the way did Robbie.

When Pete and I finally broke up it was quick and not entirely painless. The reason we broke up wasn't important because it would have happened eventually anyway. I wasn't happy and I'd had it up to there with Pete's domineering attitude and his quick temper but again my relationship was not for naught, heck no. I'm a lot stronger minded now and I don't take kindly to someone tellin me what I can or can't do. I'm no longer the subservient little woman who has to depend on her man for guidance. I do very well on my own thank you very much. Believe it or not Pete and I are still friends. Our problem was we were each raised in an environment completely opposite to one another and neither one of us could or would adapt. As friends we were okay, as mates we were a disaster. You never really know a person until you've lived with them or walked a mile in their moccasins or whatever, how true.

It's been three years or more now since Pete and I broke up and I haven't really dated but don't worry I'm hangin in there and waitin for my knight in shining armour to come moseyin along. All I want is a man who will love me as much as I love him, be kind, considerate, have a sense of humour and most importantly respect the fact that my children are my foremost priority. Now I ask you, is that expecting too much? Apparently so according to some of my friends but what the heck, I'll wait even if I'm not gettin any younger after all with what I've been through so far I figure I'm entitled to and deserve the best. Yeah, yeah, I know but I can't be wrong ALL the time, the odds must be in my favour by now don't you think? Well we'll see, keep your fingers crossed will ya? Thanks.

Now this is really it, the end. There are many more things that have happened to me along the way but they'll keep. Two books are better than one and besides I'll make more money. No I'm not greedy, the word is needy, N-E-E-D-Y, got it, good. You'll be hearin from me again so until then adios, so long, hasta la vista, whatever. Who else eh?